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LESSONS OF
THE CROSS AND PASSION,
ETC.



LESSONS OF
THE CROSS AND PASSION.
WORDS FROM THE CROSS.
THE REIGN OF SIN.
THE LORD'S PRAYER.

FOUR COURSES OF LENT LECTURES.

BY

C. J. VAUGHAN, D.D.

DEAN OF LLANDAFF

AND MASTER OF THE TEMPLE

NEW EDITION

London
MACMILLAN AND CO.
AND NEW YORK
1886

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PRINTED BY C. J. CLAY, M.A. AND SONS,
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LESSONS OF
THE CROSS AND PASSION.

I.

TOO LATE.

ST MATTHEW XXVI. 45.

92 *Sleep on now, and take your rest.*

THE first sound of the words is reposeful and comforting. *I will lay me down in peace, and take my rest—so He giveth His beloved sleep—yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet—Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well*—these are the ideas connected, even in the Bible, with that natural repose, that *taking of rest in sleep*, which almost divides with work itself this lifetime of responsible being.

But when we look below the surface, when we remember the time and the place and the circumstances, when we think of the Speaker of the words and of the persons spoken to, we shall perceive that the command—for such it seems to be—*Sleep on and*

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take your rest, had a widely different meaning from that which its sound would convey.

This was the very night on which Christ was betrayed. Already He has taken His last earthly meal, and refused to drink, even that night, of the fruit of the vine. He has done with earth, except as a suffering-place. He has gone forth with His Disciples to that sequestered garden whither the traitor disciple is about to track Him. *Exceeding sorrowful, even unto death*¹, He has thrown Himself, as it were, upon the sympathy, almost upon the compassion, of His three chief Friends, to keep awake with Him through His agony. *Tarry ye here*, He said, *and watch with me*. In vain. Grief itself has made them drowsy. *Sleeping for sorrow*² is the description of them as He comes back from His solitary wrestling to seek that fellowship which was His only earthly solace. Again and again He has reproved this sleep, even while in His tenderness He made excuse for it. *What, could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*. Therefore, when He comes at last to them and says, *Sleep on now, and take your rest*; and when, almost in the same breath with this permission, with this command,

¹ Matt. xxvi. 38.

² Luke xxii. 45.

to sleep, He adds, as though in direct contradiction to it, *Rise, let us be going*—and explains the summons by saying, *He is at hand that doth betray me*; we are obliged to look for something more and other in the saying than its literal sense. If we had been reading of a merely human actor, we should have called it irony: we should have thought it almost the language of banter or mockery, to bid persons in the same breath to *sleep on* and to *rise and be going*: as we are reading the words of One who never speaks in sarcasm, we must conclude that here, as everywhere, He is teaching something by this seeming discrepancy between the two parts of the sentence—something which it becomes us reverently to study and humbly to learn.

And we shall find the lesson a very sad one. God grant that we may not have to receive it, now or at any time, as applicable, in its deepest sadness, to ourselves!

The Disciples were about to enter into temptation. Satan, as they had been warned at the Table, had *desired* them, had *demand*ed or *begged*¹ them—even as of old he asked of God the holy Patriarch²—that he might sift them as wheat. For the enemy too, like Christ³, has his winnowing-fan: and that

¹ Luke xxii. 31.

² Job i. 11, 12. ii. 5, 6,

³ Matt. iii. 12.

which in God's hand is trial, is in the devil's hand temptation. Who has not known it? that searching, piercing, exploring process, by which sin finds us out, and compels us to show, in shame perhaps and ignominy, the inherent weakness of the creature, the absolute nothingness of the fallen? It was so with the Disciples that night. They were to be explored, put under the devil's winnowing-fan, that he might separate chaff from wheat, and show them what they were.

Christ had warned them. Again and again He had told them what that night was to be to them. And now, withdrawn with them, in that night scene, in that lonely garden, He had impressed upon them again and again the necessity of wakeful prayer. There is a watching, there is a praying, always seasonable: there is also a special watching, in the prospect of special trial: and here Christ Himself bids them practise it. They fail. They suffer the weakness of the flesh to prevail over the willingness of the spirit. They sleep while Christ watches. They suffer Him to come to them in vain, twice over, to summon them to duty. The first time, and again the second time, *He finds them sleeping*. When He comes the third time, He says not, *Watch and pray*—He says,

Sleep on now, and take your rest.

We see what He means. He means, *It is too late now. The opportunity is lost and gone. The time for watching and praying is over: you have let it escape you. You may as well sleep now: alas! there is now nothing to be done: you must now enter, as you may, into temptation: it must wrap you all round, you must breathe it, you must have it as near you as the light and air: all unarmed, all naked and defenceless, because you would not watch and pray, you must now resign yourself to the unequal encounter, and take what comes. Sleep on now, if you can, and take your rest: the soul at least can sleep—that is always possible: with sleeping souls then, if in waking bodies, rise, and meet the foe!*

If this be the true account of the words as first spoken, we shall readily think of ways in which they come home to us.

I. They have a direct bearing upon the whole subject of *Temptation*. Is there one here present who scoffs at the word temptation? Has the infidelity of the day infected you with doubts as to the existence of an evil spirit? Have any of us asked the caviller's question, How can the devil tempt? how can one spirit have access to another spirit, so as to breathe a thought or arouse a purpose of evil?

Even you will scarcely doubt the existence of human tempters. What foul sin done upon this

earth has not been suggested, has not certainly been prepared for, by what we call, speaking very generally, *influence*—the flowing in, that is, of something which was once without the man—not his own originally, but another's? Of all ruined lives, of all corrupted destroyed souls—alas! you know that they are many—which has been ruined, spoilt, destroyed, quite alone, quite of itself? Which is not at least as much a victim as an agent in the ruin? Mind has acted upon mind, spirit upon spirit: in some mysterious manner, soul does touch soul, for good or for evil: there is some attraction, some magnetism, some spell and fascination, between being and being, quite apart—in many cases, quite apart—from the body: in ten thousand instances this out-flowing and in-flowing, this effluence and this influence, is altogether mental: it helps me to realize what Scripture says of our *wrestling not against flesh and blood*, but against evil spirits: tenants of the air St Paul calls them¹, as though to guard us against a fatal security—as though to warn us that they are as near to us as the air we breathe—as near and as impalpable too!

But for the present purpose it is enough if we draw even upon the experience of human tempta-

¹ Compare Eph. ii. 2. vi. 12.

tions. Even those trials which the disciples were to undergo that night of the Passion—those which Christ spoke of as coming upon them from the devil—even these came through human agencies: *the maid who kept the door* was a human tempter when she said to Peter, *Thou also art one of them*: it was under that temptation that Peter fell, and the influence which made it a temptation was subtler and more spiritual than the form. So it is with our temptations. They too come to us, in large part, through human beings. Let us think of these.

We are warned to expect them. No man passes through life—no man passes into life—without encountering temptation. If not of this kind, then (for that very reason) of another kind; just because the disposition makes that a temptation, when this would not be. To all therefore, Christ says—to all, young and old—to all, rich and poor, one with another—*Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation*. Temptation is a peril. It must either be great suffering—it is so to those who overcome—it was so even to Christ—He, it is written, *suffered being tempted*¹—or worse. Temptation yielded to, temptation victorious, is sin: *and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death*². Therefore Christ, who loves us, and who came to

¹ Heb. ii. 18.

² James i. 15.

save, bids us to watch and pray lest we enter into temptation.

This, beforehand. The traitor was not yet in sight with his band and his weapons. The High Priest's servants, who were to be the human tempters, were themselves sleeping unconscious. This is the time for watching and praying. Before the temptation comes. Mark that well. It is the moral of the whole. Some will pray, or think that they pray, as they enter into temptation. And Prayer is good at all times. But, remember, there is a prayer which comes too late: there is a prayer which even contradicts itself in the asking: there is a prayer which asks to be kept safe under a temptation which we are going in quest of. That is not the watching and praying of which Christ speaks. To be of use, prayer must precede temptation; must arm and fence the man who is to be tempted, with that *whole armour of God*, one part of which is *Praying always*¹. The man who earnestly puts himself into the hands of God *betimes in the morning*; the man who strives to maintain throughout the day the spirit of wakefulness and upward-looking; he is the man who will be kept in that *hour of temptation which shall come on all the world*²: he is the man who,

¹ Eph. vi. 18.

² Rev. iii. 10.

whether his Lord come late or come early, shall be found, when He cometh, watching, and therefore blessed.

But if we will not pray before temptation ; if we will rely upon good intentions, which are unstable as water ; or upon a probable freedom from temptation, which may or may not be to-day, and which cannot be always ; then there comes a moment, at which Christ Himself must look upon us and say, *Too late. Sleep on now, and take your rest : the enemy is upon you now, and only they shall stand who were armed in the armour of God beforehand.*

There is a prayer, there is a watching, which comes too late in reference to temptation. He who would not obey Christ's call, when He came, twice over, to bid him watch unto prayer, must expect to have the words spoken to him, when temptation itself is upon him, *You may as well sleep on now and take your rest. Now you have entered into temptation. The very atmosphere is charged with it. It enters at eye and ear, it enters at nostril and mouth. You are an infected man. The prayer which would rise from you now, like Peter's prayer in the High Priest's kitchen, is foul with the poison which you deprecate. Too late—too late. The only chance for you now is through repentance, through bitter tears and agonized recollec-*

tions. *When thou art converted—then, not before—when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*

2. *Sleep on now, and take your rest.* The words have a meaning also, as respects *Opportunity*. The opportunities of life are many. Life itself is a wonderful thing: not least in this—in its opportunities. O how much may we do, the least of us, in this our day! Show me the man, the woman, the child, who has no influence! I shall ask many questions before I believe that there is one such! There are parents, perhaps, here to-night who would not have been here but for their children! Christ says to each of us, in reference to opportunity, *Watch and pray*. Are we willing? Who has not slept, in this matter, when he ought to have been waking? Who has not suffered minds, characters, lives, souls, to escape from that influence for good which he himself, small as he is, might have exercised? Who has not cause to reproach himself, when he compares that which he has done with that which he might have done, in this one matter—of opportunity?

God gives us all a multitude of opportunities, and with respect to all He says to us, *Watch and pray. Occupy till I come*. We will not. We never see, never feel, the sacred aspect of these things. Each opportunity as it is towards God, is also, as towards

man, a possibility of selfishness. There is not a relation in which we stand one to another, which may not be taken as a selfishness and refused as an opportunity. One by one, these are withdrawn. He who once said, *Watch and pray*, says at last, *Sleep on now, and take your rest.*

It is so with us, when we stand by the open grave, and lay in it, to be no more seen, the body of father or mother, of wife or child or friend. Ill used or well, the opportunity is gone by. We can do no more now, for ever, in reference to that relationship. I find it hard to conceive of that loss, of that severance, of that bereavement, of which this is not the chief ingredient of the bitterness. *Sleep on now*, sleep for ever, so far as regards that friend, that living soul, which was once so much to thee. No more can be done now, nothing ever again, to soothe one aching of that heart, or to slake one thirsting of that soul. That parent who was so often vexed and grieved by thy coldness, by thy unkindness, by thy disobedience, can never henceforth know thee as a strength or a consolation. That companion, dear to thee as thy soul, and, alas! not more regarded; neglected, like that, as to all interests which can survive death; cheated, like that, of all influence which God claimed from thee towards him, and now finally buried out of

thy sight—concerning him too the words are sadly, frightfully true for thee, *Sleep on now*, sleep for ever, *and take thy rest*. Too late, too late—alike the warning which might once have repelled from evil, and the persuasion which might have attracted towards the thing that is good.

So is it with regard to all the several opportunities of which life is made up. There is a time during which to watch and pray is to be safe, to be useful, to be happy : there is a time also, in each instance, when we might as well sleep on and take our rest. Such an opportunity is Education ; in the more limited sense, in which it means the training of the youth ; and in the larger and more extended sense, in which it includes the whole discipline of a lifetime. Such an opportunity is the possession of a Ministry, of a Church, of a Bible, of a Gospel. God gives us each for use : Christ says to us concerning each one, *Watch and pray*. No one of all these can last for ever. A pure and vigorous Ministry seldom lasts in one Parish beyond a generation : the Bible lasts, the Gospel lasts, but not the possessor, not the user : upon him lies the responsibility of wakeful listening, of deep pondering, of anxious profiting ; for soon must the one charge be exchanged for the other—*Watch and pray for Sleep on now and take thy rest*.

How will the recollection of each day's neglect, of Bibles unread and Sacraments despised, of every Sermon heard idly, heard contemptuously, heard in vain, arise as if from the dust to reproach and trouble us! How shall we wish, vainly wish, that again we might hear, if so be we might yet awaken, ere it be too late, from the death of sin to that life of righteousness which is the life of God!

3. *Sleep on now, and take your rest.* The saying which is so true and so solemn as to the several opportunities which God here gives us, is not less so in its bearing upon that total sum of all opportunities, which is the *Life*.

Suppose the day at last come, which is to take us from among the living.

How often has Christ said to us, while we were still in the body, *Watch and pray!* How often has Christ come back to us, as it were, from His mediatorial work—from that *business of His Father*, that office of Redemption and Mediation, of which He spoke, in early Boyhood, as (in one part or another) His natural, His necessary occupation¹—to arouse us from our sloth and lethargy and earthly-mindedness by the question, *Could ye not watch with me one hour*—not even that one brief hour, as it will hereafter

¹ Luke ii. 49.

seem to us, during which we were bidden by Him to tarry here below and share His sorrow? Often has He come and asked us this question. He has come in blessing, in the hour of joy and gladness, bidding us not to forget the Benefactor in the gift. He has come in sorrow, He has come in distress, He has come to us in bereavement—if by any means He might lighten our eyes that we sleep not the sleep of death¹. He has come, and He has questioned us, in the still small voice of conscience and of the Spirit: He has come in the chastening of night, and in the solemn grandeur of the mid-day—He has come in this form and in that, He has come as the Crucified One, He has come as the Risen, He has come as the Refiner and the Purifier², He has come as the Rebuker and as the Judge: always with this intent, that He might impress upon us the duty of watching and the blessedness of prayer—that He might make us willing to take upon us His easy yoke, and to learn of Him the blessedness of His own Spirit. He has come, and we could not always be unconscious that He was near and that He was speaking. We might have seen, had we looked, that His countenance was sad for us and His soul sorrowful: He came to us from an intercession which

¹ Psalm xiii. 3.

² Mal. iii. 3.

cannot be joyful, while it is offered for souls still sorely jeopardized and (worse yet) unconscious still or still reluctant. He stood, and He pleaded with us concerning His sufferings; reminded us of His Agony, His Cross, His Passion, His Grave; pleaded with us, by the argument of these things, that sin must be ruin, that its wages must be death. And we would not hear. We thought that an hour or two could not matter; that life was long before us, and that either God would not be extreme to mark misdoing, or else (more wicked thought still) that that blood of which Christ spoke to us could easily wash it out. And thus we procrastinated: we dallied with Christ: we parleyed with the tempter: and though Christ came back once and again to us, He still, still, found us sleeping.

We were sorry to sleep—we thought so. And He seemed half to understand it. He was willing to believe that, though the flesh was weak, yet the spirit, surely, was ready: for *He knows our frame, and He remembers that we are but dust*¹. We turned His gentleness, His long-suffering, His great patience, into an excuse for further trifling, for *continuing in sin* (though we called it not by that name)—we slept on, still slept, with Christ in sight, Christ in His agony, Christ on His cross, Christ in His glory.

¹ Psalm ciii. 14.

There is an end to these things—or Christ would not be true. There is an end. We know one part of it—the outward part: the fact of death, and its nearness, and its universality: we see one another die, we expect to die—we say so, we know it—yet we sleep on.

When Christ at last comes—the third time, the Gospel story, which is also a Gospel parable, calls it, but, as concerning the thing signified, rather for the thousandth, the ten thousandth time—and finds us still sleeping; then He is compelled to say—else He could be trifled with, else He were not God, He were not the Judge, He were not the Faithful One and the True—He is compelled to say, *Sleep on now, and take your rest.* The time is gone by. *The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved*¹. Sleep indeed, rest, is not the word for that which comes after death to the impenitent and the unsaved—any more than it was the real thing to which the disciples were called, when it was said to them in the same breath, *Rise and be going—the traitor is here!* It is the language of sadness, of hopelessness, of despair: it is the *Too late* of a lost life—the *Too late, too late*, of a boundless eternity.

God grant us all grace to awaken this night to

¹ Jer. viii. 20.

reflection, to penitence, to newness of life! *By Thy Cross and Passion—by Thy precious Death, by Thy glorious Resurrection—in all time of our tribulation, in all time of our wealth, in the hour of our death, in the day of our judgment—*

Good Lord,

Good Lord,

deliver us!

SUNDAY NEXT BEFORE EASTER,

March 21, 1869.

II.

THE DIVINE SACRIFICE AND THE HUMAN PRIESTHOOD.

HEBREWS X. 19—22.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having an High Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

SURELY this passage is the very key-note of the thought, and feeling, and worship too, of Passion Week. We cannot wait for it till Good Friday, when we shall read it in the Epistle: we must go for it now. For what is our one risk, our one fear and peril, in the celebrations, at once mournful and consolatory,

which have gathered or are to gather us from so many homes and occupations at this holy season? Is it not this? lest we should look upon the Agony, and the Passion, and the Cross, and the Grave, with sadness indeed, with grief, almost with horror, for the suffering endured, for the wrong done, for the holy soul wrung, and the Divine Man outraged—but without taking it home to ourselves either in its cause or in its consequence? lest we should gaze upon the spectacle and shut our eyes to its deep mystery, to its solemn admonition, to its healing comfort; saying indeed, *Was there ever sorrow like unto this sorrow?* but failing to ponder the accompanying question, *Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by*¹?

Now the text tells us that that sight of anguish and shame was something, is something, to each one of us; more than any other event that ever took place upon the earth; more real, more concerning, more vital, to each one here present, than any most bitter, most joyous experience, that ever changed a life or reversed the destiny of a soul. If we can only enter into this one exhortation, we shall find Passion Week not a form but a substance, and we shall go forth from it servants and soldiers of the Crucified One, no longer in name only, but in deed and in truth.

¹ Lam. i. 12.

The Epistle to the Hebrews may be described as the Gospel of the Old Testament. It teaches us how every act of God from the beginning of time had a direct view to Christ; how the Law itself, in its most obscure, least spiritual, most ceremonial parts, was a very Gospel written beforehand in type and shadow, quickening a hope afterwards to be fulfilled, and bearing witness to the profound maxim of St James the Lord's Brother, *Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world*¹.

The Epistle had, like every Book of Scripture, a direct practical object for those to whom it was sent. A tremendous crisis was at hand for its first readers. The stroke of Divine Providence, acting (as usual) through human agency, was about to fell to the ground the sturdy oak of Judaism, to level the altar of its sacrifices, and to render the Levitical worship henceforth an impossibility for the Israelite. When that time came, would the Hebrew Christian—this was the question—accept the Divine omen? Would he see God's hand in this demolition of what was once God's handywork? Would he be willing to give up his country for his faith, and the strong tie of Patriotism for the one stronger obligation of fidelity to his Spiritual King?

¹ Acts xv. 18.

This Epistle came to him, on the very eve of this terrible choice and crisis, to echo in his ears the momentous word—

CHRIST IS ALL!

He is more than created Angel, He is more than human Lawgiver or Mediator, He is more than mortal Priest or Intercessor—He is more than Tabernacle or Temple, He is more than Altar or Mercy-seat, He is more than Offering or Sacrifice: having Him, you are rich in destitution; losing Him, you may get all and have nothing: follow Him, He is your Saviour; cleave to Him, He is your Life.

With the first words of the text, the Apostle, leaving doctrine, enters upon its application. He has dwelt upon the everlasting tenure of Christ's Priesthood, and contrasted it with the transferable, ever-changing priesthoods of dying men. He has dwelt upon the place of Christ's ministration, not an earthly tabernacle, but the very Presence of God in Heaven. He has dwelt upon the intrinsic value of Christ's Sacrifice, as needing, as capable of, neither repetition, nor addition, nor fulfilment, inasmuch as by it, once offered, *He has perfected for ever them that are sanctified*¹.

¹ Heb. x. 14.

And now, by a striking and even startling adaptation of his argument, he proceeds to say this—

In virtue of the one Divine Sacrifice, you too are Priests. You also, the whole body of common Christians, are *an holy priesthood*, ordained to offer up *spiritual sacrifices*¹. More still than this. Each one of you is not only a subordinate Priest, like those of the Levitical order, occupied in certain ministrations about the Tabernacle and the Altar, yet excluded from its highest office of all, and from its innermost and most sacred shrine: each one of you is, in his own person, a High Priest; each one of you is called to do in his own person a thing which, under the Law, only the one High Priest was permitted to do—to take with him, not in his hand but in his heart, the blood of the one all-availing Sacrifice, and, in virtue of this passport, to penetrate through the veil, into the immediate Presence of God Himself, *with a true heart, and in full assurance of faith*.

To understand this precept thoroughly, we must go back to the Book of Leviticus, and to the ceremonies of the great Day of Expiation on the 10th day of the 7th month².

That was the one only day of the whole year, on which any human eye or foot was suffered to pass

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 5.

² Lev. xvi. 1, &c.

within the mysterious veil which hung between the two chambers of the Tabernacle.

On that day the High Priest alone, in garments of solemn humiliation, was directed to enter twice within the dividing curtain, first with the blood of a sin-offering for himself, and then secondly with the blood of a sin-offering for the people. On that one only day of all the year, he, alone of his generation, saw the Holiest Place of all, in which stood the Ark with its contents—the actual Decalogue, the Ten Words of God's commandment, graven on tablets of stone—and a few other wonderful records of the sojourn of Israel in the wilderness¹; records of unbelief and murmuring, changed by God's power into memorials of His Omnipotent grace and presence.

The Apostle tells us that all this minuteness of ordinance had a meaning. I myself find it easier to believe that it had a meaning than that it had none. If God had anything at all to do with that first Dispensation, I can more readily suppose that He arranged it with a view to something than with a view to nothing. If the blood spoken of was a type of Christ's Blood, and if the Holy of Holies was a type of God's Presence in Heaven, there is a warrant, at

¹ Heb. ix. 4.

once, for many things which otherwise I might have thought trivial or arbitrary.

The Apostle says that it was so. *The Holy Ghost*, he says, *this signifying*¹—the Holy Ghost, with whom it is equally easy to teach by word or by sign, designing to express this, by a visible token, to a carnal and unspiritual age—that there was a difficulty, an obstacle somewhere, to the free access of the sinful to the Holy One; a difficulty and an obstacle which must be allowed to press heavily for a time upon the conscience and heart of mankind, until in due course God should explain Himself, and teach a desiring but excluded soul how to seek Him acceptably—how to find access, and how to maintain the access once found, to the Presence and Mercy-seat of its God.

And now God has explained Himself.

Is it possible that there is any one person here present who does not care to be told how he can draw nigh to God? I trust not! Is not this the thing which presses upon the soul of a sinner—and *there is no man who sinneth not*²—how he can get through that Veil, that heavy massive curtain, which hangs between him and the pure Heaven where God is?

You have heard and read, again and again, in the

¹ Heb. ix. 8.

² 1 Kings viii. 46.

Gospel History, how that very curtain, or its successor in the restored Temple, split of its own accord from top to bottom, at the moment of Christ's last breath; how, just when Jesus was saying, with a loud cry, *Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit*, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. I can believe that. That sign was just what ought to have been, if Moses wrote of Christ¹, and if the Law was in any sense the schoolmaster to the Gospel². And here the Apostle to the Hebrews interprets for us that rent veil; telling us what it meant, and how to use it.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.

Boldness, he says. Not audacity, but confidence: that freedom and frankness of utterance which a slave has not before his tyrant, but which a dutiful subject, a respectful servant, a loving child has before his Sovereign, before his Master, before his Father. That freedom of speech which springs out of reverence and gratitude and love combined; which hides nothing, because all is known, and because the worst that can be told only makes the speaking more needful and the confidence more blessed and more assured. Have you some secret upon your soul—

¹ John v. 46.

² Gal. iii. 24.

something which you would not breathe to your nearest and your most dear? O get rid of it as a secret, by breathing it into the ear of Him who is at once Omniscient—aware of it already—and yet tenderly loving, and yet strong to save!

Boldness for the entering of the holiest. That veil which kept out all inferior Priests, even those who lighted the lamps and changed the shewbread—that veil which excluded even the High Priest every day of the year save one—need not keep out you. Under Christ, you, Christian man, Christian woman, are your own High Priest. Push aside the dividing Veil, and enter.

But what shall you take with you? The High Priest must take with him the incense beaten small, and the censer of coals from the great brasen altar. He must take with him also—that *he die not*¹—the bowl of blood from the bullock and the goat of the sin-offering. What must you take?

You are to enter *by (in) the blood of Jesus*. I know not how we could have had more strongly impressed upon us the solemn, the august importance of that amazing act of Sacrifice, by which our Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for the sins of the world. Whenever we use our sacerdotal privilege of entering

¹ Lev. xvi. 13.

God's Presence, we must do so *in the blood of Jesus*—on the strength of what He has done for us—in virtue of His Death. O, while God speaks of it in this way, I can be content to wait! Perhaps we shall know—or perhaps we shall never know—exactly how Christ atoned. Meanwhile, I shall be careful to take with me the Blood! I will not risk rejection, I will not incur the charge of presumption, by pushing aside that Curtain till I am sure that I have the Blood—that is, except in firm reliance upon the Atonement, mysterious yet necessary, of our Lord Jesus Christ. I do not see that God explains to me, or that God will blame me for not understanding without Him, exactly how the Death of Jesus Christ atoned for my sin: but I do see that He everywhere speaks of it as something real, something which He expects me to rely upon, even because He Himself has revealed it to me.

I hold in my hand the bason of sacrificial blood—in other words, I have in my heart a firm reliance upon what Jesus Christ did for me, in bearing my sins—I approach the Veil—how?

The Apostle says, *By a new and a living way which Christ consecrated for us*. Every step is on holy ground. And that ground which is all holy, because it is all God's, needs a special consecration and

dedication for the sinner. Heaven itself, we read in the 9th chapter, though pure in itself, as being God's Presence, yet needed a relative purification¹, that is, a consecration for man's entrance: therefore not only the end, but the way, was all dedicated for us and inaugurated by Jesus Christ: each step of the first approach, and each step of each day's approach, to God's Mercy-seat, must be taken on the strength of what Christ has done for us. The way by which we draw nigh is also a *new* way; not the old way of forms and ceremonies, but a spiritual way, paved in the heart, and issuing in God's Presence. And it is a *living* way; one in which dead victims are valueless as dead works²; one in which nothing avails but the offering of a life—Christ's life first, our life afterwards and for ever.

Now this way—this new and living way—I want to find, I want to keep it: in which direction does it lie? how can I make sure of entering upon, how of keeping it?

See you that Veil—that Curtain, of which we have said so much—hanging there, not outside the first door—you have passed inside that—but between the two chambers of the Tabernacle? Yes:—What is that Veil? It is, the Apostle says,

¹ Heb. ix. 23.

² Heb. ix. 14.

His flesh; the human nature of our Lord Jesus Christ.

O, how much do we owe to the Incarnation of Jesus Christ! What a vague, impalpable, intangible thing, to the carnal, unspiritual, fallen man, is the pure and glorious Divinity! *No man*, Scripture says, *hath seen God at any time*¹: *no man*, Scripture says again, *hath seen or can see Him*²: we know that He is, and that He is great and good and Omnipotent and Omnipresent—but what of that? I am not great and good—how can I draw nigh to Him?

Well then, God knew this difficulty, this inaccessibility of the Infinite to the finite—and what has He done? Look again at that Veil. You may think that it divides, but it really forms a link between you and your God. That Veil, that Curtain, is the Humanity of Jesus Christ. He took our nature upon Him, that in it He might feel, that in it He might be tempted, that in it He might suffer, that in it He might die. Draw nigh to Him in it—approach the Veil which is His Flesh, and you will be at the very door, at the very entrance, of the Heaven of the Invisible and the Self-existent. Push aside that Veil—or rather, enter through it, through Jesus Christ as made for you very Man—and you

¹ John i. 18.

² 1 Tim. vi. 16.

are in God's Presence at once. That august shrine and presence-chamber, which only one man could see in each generation—he only once a year, he only in figure and type—you can enter, not familiarly indeed yet boldly, without concealment, without a secret, as often as you will, in the Blood of Jesus, and through the Veil which is His Flesh.

I said indeed that every Christian man is a High Priest. It is so. The Apostle says this in plain words here. But it is not that he takes Christ's place. He is not his own High Priest in the sense in which Christ is the High Priest of man. No. He takes Christ's blood with him when he goes in. So far Christ is the Victim, the Sacrifice, once offered, never again to bleed or suffer or die, long as the world stands, long as eternity endures. But the 21st verse says this:—You are not independent High Priests, even with the Sacrifice, even with the Blood. No, you have still a High Priest—or rather, *a great (mighty) Priest*—over the House of God. Ill were it for us if it were not so! Even the all-sufficient Sacrifice would be none, unless the Divine Victim lived, unless the Divine Victim were also the Immortal Priest. It is the Life after death which gives efficacy even to the Death. It is the presence of the mighty Priest in Heaven which makes the entering of the

Holiest possible for man below. Christ the Sacrifice is also Christ the Priest, Christ the Intercessor, and Christ the Life.

O, my brethren, we are well equipped and furnished for the Divine life proposed to us. Then *let us draw near*. The original says, *Let us keep drawing near*. It is not one act to which we are called. It is a repetition, it is a perpetuity, of acts of approach. This is our life. To be always drawing near. In acts of worship—of public prayer and praise, and edification and communion. But not thus only. This House of God—beautiful, majestic, august as it is—cannot supersede the more spiritual one. The heart is the shrine. There, then, let us be drawing near. *In the evening, and morning, and at noon-day, will I pray, and that instantly*¹. And at special times and seasons also. When I am in heaviness, in loneliness, in sorrow. When I feel myself neglected, outcast, spurned by those I love, then let me draw near to One who never despises. And when the tempter is very near to me—when I hear his footstep, when I feel his breath, when he whispers to me, *It is written*²—*Thou shalt not surely die*³—then let me draw nigh. Satan never passes that Veil, which is the Flesh of Christ. He remembers too well, too

¹ Psalm lv. 17.

² Matt. iv. 6.

³ Gen. iii. 4.

vividly, what he suffered from it once below: the bruise in his head¹, once received from it, is never forgotten. Take the Blood, go within the Veil—Satan will not follow you. And when death approaches, O, then—then more literally, then above all—draw near with a true heart, and you shall find rest for ever.

Yes, *with a true heart*—that there must be—and also *a full assurance of faith*. Of course you cannot go through that Curtain, unless you have the Blood with you, unless you know what the Veil is, unless you believe Who dwells within. But perhaps you have not this. You are a timid doubting person. You have a spark of faith—you can say, *To whom else shall I go?*—but you have no conviction, no confidence, nothing to be called full assurance. O, my brethren, it is a great mercy to know that Jesus Christ *breaks not the bruised reed, quenches not even the smouldering flax*². I never heard of any one whom He shut out. He judges of Faith, not so much by what a man feels, as by what he does. If He sees a man trying to get to the Veil, making for the Veil, however tottering or vacillating be the steps, He never repulses, He never pushes him aside! Desire to get through the Veil, resolve to get through the Veil—and you

¹ Gen. iii. 15.

² Matt. xii. 20.

have faith enough for acceptance, enough for safety, if not enough for happiness or for triumph or for transport !

Just two words more.

We have spoken of the Christian as a High Priest. The Christian life is that—the life of one of God's dedicated, set-apart, consecrated ones. There are two parts in that consecration. There were two parts in the Aaronic consecration¹. The last words of the text express them. There is first the *heart sprinkled from*—that is, *so as to take away*—*an evil conscience*. What is an evil conscience? It is a conscience all blotted and disfigured and distressed by guilt unforgiven and by sin unsubdued. We cannot separate these two things; though, theologically, they are distinguished into the justifying and the sanctifying. But we take St John's words very broadly when he says, *The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin*. We do not believe in a forgiveness which brings with it no holiness. We do not believe in it because we see no comfort in it, and because we are sure that God, who *is not mocked*², does not mock. Therefore we take *the blood of sprinkling*³, that is, the blood of Christ's Cross, as carrying with it, in one, two virtues—the virtue of

¹ Exod. xxix. 4, 20.

² Gal. vi. 7.

³ Heb. xii. 24.

the forgiving, and the virtue of the cleansing. Be sure, where one is, there is the other. There may be a ghost or a counterfeit of either alone: but where one is really, there is the other. And surely, surely, it is well so! This makes the Gospel a sound, not a fantastic thing; a power and a life, not a jest and a mockery.

Then the High Priest has this first—the consecrating Blood. He believes in Jesus Christ, and is forgiven; he believes in Jesus Christ, and is made clean. Comfort him not—which is, in other words, delude him not—with a forgiveness which is no sanctification, with a relief from punishment, which is not also an escape from sin!

And then, finally, there is the *washing of the body* with the baptismal water. A light and easy thing in these days; when the little child, passive and unintelligent, is brought, as of course, to the consecrating stream. Not of course in old days; when the Baptism of water was oftentimes also a Baptism of blood. Therefore we must see that the real thing go along, in us, with the typical. We must see that *the answer of a good conscience* follow, if it could not accompany, *the putting away of the filth of the flesh*¹; that ours be that mind of the baptized, that penitent, that be-

¹ 1 Pet. iii. 21.

lieving mind, without which the water is a form, or, if not wholly a form, yet rather a condemnation than a blessing !

So let us keep our Holy Week, with thoughts altogether sober and wholesome and solemn ! Let us try, let us labour, let us watch, let us pray, that we may draw out of this great, this awful commemoration its deepest, highest, most spiritual good ; and so pass through the Cross and through the Grave of Jesus, to that blessed Easter, that glorious Resurrection-day, which shall knit together all the redeemed in everlasting fellowship and union before the throne of God !

MONDAY BEFORE EASTER,

March 22, 1869.

III.

LOVE NOT THE WORLD.

I JOHN ii. 15.

Love not the world.

WHEN St Paul said that by the Cross of Jesus Christ *the world was crucified to him and he to the world*¹; when his Master said, summing up at its close the whole work, the whole achievement, of His earthly being,

*I have overcome the world*²;

this brief charge which I have read to you—

Love not the world—

was made by these utterances, not only a suitable text for Passion Week, but also, rightly understood, the very sum and substance of all that this sacred season has to say to us in the way of *doctrine, of reproof, of correction, of instruction in righteousness*³.

¹ Gal. vi. 14.

² John xvi. 33.

³ 2 Tim. iii. 16.

Give yourselves, with me, my brethren, this night, diligently to ponder, and earnestly to appropriate this holy lesson of St John,

Love not the world.

The tone of the words is emphatic; and the sense, on a first hearing, plain.

The World—the *Love of the World*—the prohibition of *the Love of the World*—who does not apprehend; who does not recognize, the thing spoken of, and the rule laid down concerning it?

Christians all admit that to be worldly is wrong. To call a man worldly is to reproach him. It is almost to say that he is not a Christian. So thoroughly is the text accepted as a principle, as a maxim, of the Gospel.

And yet how different, how opposite, are the senses in which men have read, are reading, will to the end read, this brief saying!

The world—how vague, how dim, how capricious, our idea of it! How few mean by it their own world!

And *the love of the world*—how far off from ourselves do we place the sentiment expressed by it! Into how visionary a region do we dismiss the affection, the attachment, the passion, to which alone we make the term applicable!

And the prohibition, consequently—the saying, *Love not the world*—Feel not this improbable affection for this visionary thing—what has become of it, by this time, as a reality for ourselves? Where is its bite or its sting for the conscience of the most scrupulous? Who accuses himself definitely of its transgression, or knows in which direction to set his face that he may keep it in the future?

Love not the world.

We have two words before us—the one constant in sense, the other variable. What *the World* is, as St John here uses it, demands enquiry: what Love is, needs none. Love is a primary element of our being: there are not even two kinds of it. It is the object, which modifies it. The love of Man and the love of God differ only in the object. That love of the World, which is here forbidden us, is the same love, in the feeling and in the heart, which, in other applications, is elsewhere commanded. The word is the same which, in its equivalent rendering *Charity*, gives the key-note to that most eloquent, most musical, of Scripture panegyrics, the 13th chapter of St Paul's 1st Epistle to the Corinthians. *Love not the world*, is, *Have no charity for it*. Feel not towards it that feeling, cherish not towards it that mind, which, towards other things or other persons, is the very grace of charity:

be not towards it longsuffering, be not tolerant, be not hopeful, be not enduring¹: cast it out of your regard, out of your belief, out of your kindness, out of your sympathy: make war with it, make no truce with it and no covenant: take it for your foe, let your heart have no pity for it, no forbearance, no charity.

We are driven back, then, to the question, what is this *World*, which is to be the excepted thing, the one excepted thing, from the universal duty of loving?

And it becomes the more necessary to ask this question and to answer it, when we call to mind that this very love, which is forbidden to us as Christians, is, in name at least, the very love which God feels: for the terms are the same, both one and other, in the two Scripture phrases—*God loved the world*²—so loved that He gave Christ for it; and, *Love not the world*—for *if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him*.

There are two senses, and but two, of the term *World* in Scripture, which could possibly come into competition in connection with the text before us. Both are familiar to the students of St John.

The first of these is, the Universe of created Being. When Christ is said to *come into the world* by

¹ See 1 Cor. xiii. 7.

² John iii. 16.

Incarnation, and when He is said to *leave the world*¹ by Ascension, it is in this meaning. He, the Divine Creator, was no part of the Universe made. It was necessary that a link with it should be found for Him, a connection which before was not, when He *took upon Him to deliver man*. That link was the Virgin Mother—the clothing with man's flesh—the bringing into one Person with the Eternal Godhead the mortal body and the reasonable soul of a Man; and in that flesh, and with that soul, submitting to act, and submitting to suffer, as One who belonged to, and was contained in, the world which Himself had made. *I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again I leave the world, and go to the Father.* *The World*, in this use, is the Universe of created Being.

Will the saying, *Love not the world*, have an adequate scope in this application?

Something, certainly, it might teach us. Set not your affection on things that are seen. *The things which are seen are temporal*². Grasp not with too eager a hand, use not with too keen an enjoyment, that universe of matter from which death must sever you—which, for you at least, must perish with the using. You cannot indeed too much admire, you

¹ John xvi. 28.

² 2 Cor. iv. 18.

cannot too earnestly study, you cannot too minutely investigate, the wonders and glories of God's handy-work ; you cannot pursue with too resolute a step the turnings and windings, the heights and the depths, of that mystery of the Divine arrangement which we mean, or ought to mean, by Nature : these things are all of God, and He has revealed Himself in them. Yet even here you tread, in some ways, on perilous ground. The love of the Cosmos—the word is naturalized in English—may become an idolatry. When you look up to the sky, you may (as the Lawgiver wrote) *be driven to worship*¹. The observation of order may obscure the thought of will. The student of Science may degenerate—he need not—into a Materialist. The lover of Truth has sometimes—not because, we say, but although, he was so—fallen into doubt or denial of the Truth. The man whose soul demands a living God for his Friend and for his Comforter has lost himself in that dreary region of mechanical necessity in which life itself is but the toiling, drudging bonds slave of systems which cannot feel and laws which cannot love. The maxim, *Love not the world*, even if the world be Nature, Creation as God made, the Universe as God upholds it, says this at least to us, *Love not so as to forget Him*.

¹ Deut. iv. 19.

in it: see Him in all, and let the soul kneel while the mind explores.

Or if ever, not through Science but from a simpler motive still, you should find yourself clinging too tenaciously to the Universe of things seen ; should be tempted to say, as some beautiful natures have said, *I cannot bear to leave this bright world, with its skies and its seas, its flowers and landscapes, its glories and its harmonies, and to think of a state in which there shall be nothing but the spiritual* ; then let St John's words come into your heart with a truer and a more trustful feeling : correct the love of the World by the thought of the Mind which planned and the Power which ordered it : wait for the unveiling of a scene fairer and more beautiful and more satisfying still : say to yourself, in words not more of soothing comfort than of convincing truth,

*O God ! O Good beyond compare !
If thus Thy meaner works are fair,
If thus Thy bounties gild the span
Of ruined earth and sinful man,
How glorious must the mansion be
Where Thy redeemed shall dwell with Thee !*

Or if, yet once more, it be, not Nature, but human affection, which binds you to the present ; if your thought is, *What will that other world be to me, of*

which it is written that there they neither marry nor are given in marriage¹, as though to bid us expect no special ties, no individual recognitions, but rather one equal, unselfish, self-forgetting affection in which at present I can see neither sparkle nor satisfaction; if this be the form in which the Cosmos binds you to the present, and would forbid you to look either with longing or with toleration towards that new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness², then let the thought come to you, Trust Him who has done the greater to do the less; trust Him who has reopened to you through the Sacrifice of His Son a lost Heaven, to make that Heaven satisfying and delightful: love not the world as though it were your all; let Him who made, also fill, every part, every chamber, of your being: the things which are seen, even in their highest height, are temporal; the things which are not seen, the Cosmos that shall be, alone eternal³.

Love not the world.

St John himself shall interpret for us. Hitherto we have recognized an inadequate, though not unjustified, rendering of the precept before us. We could not, in that which has yet been said, give its fullest force to the *Love not*. Now we will give it its

¹ Luke xx. 35.

² 2 Pet. iii. 13.

³ 2 Cor. iv. 18.

uttermost weight. *Have no charity, no tolerance, no forbearance, for the world.*

For now we shall read *the World* by the light which St John gives us, when he adds, as his description of the contents of the World, his exhaustive description—*ALL that is in the world—*

*The lust of the flesh,
The lust of the eyes,
And the pride of life.*

He speaks then not of the Universe as God made it; not of that Nature upon which God may still look and call it very good¹; not of the beautiful order, not of the wonderful scene, not of the delightful home, which survives, for us, the entrance of sin and death; but, on the contrary, of man's world—of the world which sin has deeply infected, of the world which is God's enemy, the world which, to use his own emphatic definition, *lieth in the wicked one*².

It is a dark and gloomy picture which he draws of it.

St John makes the World—as he understands the term—hold only three things.

(1) There is that *lust of the flesh* which is sensuality—in all its forms. O, we must speak plainly, sometimes, of the world of man, and of human life, as

¹ Gen. i. 31.

² 1 John v. 19.

we see it. That world is in all of us. When we promised to renounce the world, do not imagine that we undertook a crusade against other men and external influences. The world of sensuality is within us. It is there that we must face it. For what purpose was this Lent instituted? To remind us that there is a lusting of the flesh in each one of us. Now as intemperance, now as gluttony, now as a self-indulgence of some yet worse kind apart from the question, *What has God said? is this desire, is this longing, according to, or apart from and against, His holy will and law concerning me?* in one form or in another it is the World which assails us, even when we might rather describe our antagonist as the Flesh or the Devil.

It is remarkable—I know not that it has received the attention deserved by it—that, whereas St John makes the Flesh one part of the World, St Paul, on the contrary, classes many impulses of the World under the category of the Flesh. It may be that we read, in this characteristic of the two doctrines, some distinctive feature of the two men. St Paul seems to have made all evil a working of the flesh. He felt that that human body which is at once the inlet and the outlet of all influence—that body through which alone we communicate with other men, and receive their communications into ourselves—that body in

which we fight and war, in which we strive and debate, for the sake of which we desire things without, and by the agency of which we so much as breathe one thought or express one idea or exercise one power towards our fellow-men—is *the* enemy for each one of us. If we can *keep that body under*; if, according to his vigorous similitude, we can but so *bruise and buffet* it as to enslave it effectually to the soul, and drag it at the chariot-wheels of spirit, day by day and in all things; then we are victors over all evil; then we shall have *withstood in the evil day*¹; then, having *preached to others*, we shall ourselves not *be castaways*². To have *crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts*³, to have laid aside the body in the grave of Jesus Christ⁴, to be *no longer in the flesh but in the spirit*⁵—this, for St Paul, was the whole of that triumph of which he spoke in the glowing exclamation, *Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*⁶!

St John, on the other hand, classes even sins of the Flesh under the general superscription of the World. Metaphysicians, I suppose, would say, that the one expression is subjective, the other objective.

¹ Eph. vi. 13.

² 1 Cor. ix. 27.

³ Gal. v. 24.

⁴ Rom. vi. 4. Col. ii. 12.

⁵ Rom. viii. 9.

⁶ 1 Cor. xv. 57.

St Paul describes sin as it affects the man. St John describes sin in the aspect of the thing which affects. Whether it be that St John's experience of the personal conflict was less severe, less agonizing, than St Paul's, so that he could look on, with a larger and more contemplative survey, upon the sin-spoilt Creation, and feel less acutely the entrance of the temptations of sense into the sphere of the individual being—whatever the cause, you would be surprised to see how largely the word *Flesh* predominates in a Concordance of St Paul's writings, and how beyond all proportion the term *World* preponderates in a Concordance of St John.

(2) St John has a second term for the contents of the world. *The lust of the eyes.*

I know that this might be made synonymous with the former. The lusting of the flesh is in large part *engendered in the eyes*. But the Old Testament usage is decisive as to the meaning. This is covetousness, as the other was sensuality. *The eye is not satisfied with getting*¹ is the comment of Ecclesiastes upon the phraseology of St John.

Covetousness. The lust of getting. My brethren, I think that in these days we can endorse from experience that saying of St Paul—though it is

¹ Eccles. i. 8.

perhaps somewhat exaggerated by the insertion in the English Version of the definite for the indefinite article—that *the love of money is the root of all evil*¹. What have we not seen in our days to spring from it? Falsehood, trickery, fraud, malice, envy, licentiousness, murder. I do not suppose that any one here present accuses himself of Covetousness. It is an ugly name: we call the thing, for ourselves, by some other. Yet the thing infects high and low—yes, young and old: *there may be covetousness in the gain of a farthing*—yes, look again, covetousness is in all of us!

(3) He adds a third particular. *The pride of life*. Do not suppose that the *life* spoken of is the same thing, in the original, with that Eternal Life of which such glorious things are written in the Bible. The *life* of which St John speaks is the life of this world; that Adam life which is bounded by time; which comes to us with birth, and which dies in us at our death. Wonderful, when we examine it, is John's description of this life of time! He speaks of the *pride*—it is too good a word for his strong Greek phrase—he calls it the bragging, the imposture—I should be afraid to call it here by its modern synonym—the arrogance, the self-display, the lying vanity, of this life. What can we say of this? Must we not

¹ 1 Tim. vi. 10.

confess that this life of the nineteenth century is full of it? I know that it is a large word. Everything which says and does not; everything which professes and is not; everything which struts and parades itself, yet must die, is a part of it. Ambition is a part of it. That rank, that title, that great name, which earth gives to its Heroes, is a part of it. That false, fallacious seeming which hangs about political strife; that vast, towering pretension which *the Question of the Day* makes for its day; that pretension which is refuted by the next century, the next year, the next session, the next event—that too is a part of it. How much more is Fashion a part of it! Mark, as those not involved in it, alone perhaps, can mark, the tyranny, the lying tyranny, the cruel tyranny, of Fashion: see it rise and fall and be succeeded; hear it deliver judgment upon the rank below; hear it admit and exclude, not by merit; hear it condemn by hearsay, and acquit by look: then carry your thoughts onwards, and place it, in anticipation, at the Bar of God—O, you will understand St John's word for it then: he calls it the pride, the pretence, the hollow boasting, of this life!

Such is St John's enumeration of the contents of his Cosmos; the World not as God made, but as man

has corrupted it. The other was temporal—this is sinful. Of the other he might say, *Set not your heart upon it*. Of this he says, literally, *Have no charity for it!*

The same threefold enumeration of the thing that is evil, is seen in the record, in Genesis, of Man's Fall. The forbidden thing was *good for food*—there was the lust of the flesh: it was also *pleasant to the eyes*—there, in so many words, is the lusting of the eye: it was also *to be desired to make one wise*¹—wise in that devil's wisdom which is independence of God: all was summed up in it, which should be developed later into new and somewhat more pretentious forms of antagonism to the Creator. St John tells us what it was, late in Rome's history: we see it, every day, *upon whom the ends of the world are come*².

It is not fanciful to see the same threefold developement of evil in that great counterpart of human temptation which we commemorate at this season. *Command that this stone be made bread*—there spake the tempter to the presumed *lusting of the flesh* in Jesus. *All these things will I give Thee*, this pomp and glory and world-empire, *if Thou wilt fall down and worship me*—the lusting of the eye was to be evoked in that challenge. *If Thou be the Son of*

¹ Gen. iii. 6.

² 1 Cor. x. 11.

*God, cast Thyself down from hence*¹—there was addressed that false, idle pretension of the ambitious element in the fallen, which would have responded to the summons, if *the prince of this world had had anything in Jesus*².

My brethren, I know that there is much in us, not in the basest of us, itself not of the basest, to argue against St John's warning,

Love not the world.

Many men say—I can hear them, I can half feel with them—Surely these calls to unworldliness are as unwise as they are fantastic. Is it really to be desired that men should take part in the life of this world with the feeling that it is a dream? Is it not more true, therefore more Christian, to say, *That which thou doest do with thy might*³? Be a tradesman, a professional man, a politician, a man of society—be a judge, be a courtier, be a leader of fashion—with the feeling that the thing in hand is important. Nothing will be done while the heart misgives itself, or while the man who is to act writes the very doing insignificant. Hear St John. He says, *Love not the world.* The thing which is sinful in it, do not at all. The thing which is only transitory in it, do as such; do with a higher love in thee; do as one who must die;

¹ Luke iv. 3, 6, 7, 9.

² John xiv. 30.

³ Eccles. ix. 10.

as one who knows and would have it so ; as one who has in him the love of God, and knows that *the fashion of this world passes away*¹.

There cannot be in any of us two loves, any more than there can be two devotions. He who loves God with all his heart, cannot in the same sense love ought else. He who loves the world, St John says, *the love of the Father is not in him*².

And the World passes away, and the love of it. O, is there not in you a desire of something that shall abide? Do you not care to be something higher and nobler than a fleeting atom in a fleeting whole—to be but drifting down with the stream of time into a gulf which shall make all your past being a nonentity and a nothingness? Surely you have within you that longing for perpetuity which is the very index and pledge of immortality—that resolute repudiation of transitoriness which is one chief argument for eternity?

I know that it is difficult—O how difficult—not to love the world. With how crushing a weight lie upon us the things that are seen—the interests and cares, the hopes and the fears, of mortal being ! Tell me not that these things are fancies: we live in them. These things have power to render life itself an

¹ 1 Cor. vii. 31.

² 1 John ii. 15.

endurance, or a delight. If those around me avoid, dislike, hate me; if they so much as jar upon me by their manners, by their tones, by their looks; they can mar, they can spoil, they can ruin my happiness. If that which God has made it natural for me, being what I am, to desire and to seek after, always eludes me; if I am always the one disappointed, outstripped, mocked, in the race, in the competition, of this life; if no one will love me, or not the one person whom I love; it is idle to say that these things are fancies: if they be fancies, then all I know is that some fancies are very real!

Granted all this, still, St John says, Christ says, *Love not the world*. If it is hard for you, the disappointed one, to obey this precept, is it easier for the successful? Yet you are willing enough to call him worldly if he cannot—if you think he does not! Wisely does our Lord group together the *cares* with the *riches* and the *pleasures*, and make them all alike those thorns which choke the good seed¹. Life is not so unequal, so iniquitous, as we often imagine it, in reference at least to the eternal issue. Advantage and disadvantage, help and hindrance, ease and difficulty, are more equally apportioned, more nicely commingled, than we sometimes think them—if we

¹ Luke viii. 14.

look at the long future, at the immortal life beyond.

To each one of us this is offered—offered in the Book of God, offered also in the secret of the heart—the alternative love of the Father and of the World. Both none can have—either every man. If we will, we may take the World; its good and its evil, its sweet and its bitter, its large promise and its scant performance. We may take it, if we will—we may love it, if we can.

But then, St John says, we can have nothing else. We cannot have the other love—God's love, and the love of God; the one speaking, and the other answering; the one opening Heaven, the other entering the Heaven opened.

This is the choice. In it is set before us life and death. Words would but darken counsel. Each heart feels and knows that this is its choice, this its crisis:—this too its freedom—the one only freedom of the fallen: a love we must have, but we may have which we will. Every morning wakens us to choose afresh; says to us, *Choose this day whom you will love.* The day of grace is the sum of these days; and the product of these choices is the immortal man. *The world passeth away, and the love thereof: he who chooses the love of God abideth for ever.*

Let us thank God for every influence by which He guides towards the right choice. When, as at this time, we are gathered by the Church's call to gaze upon the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ; when we kneel beside a deathbed, when we stand by an open grave, when we receive in ourselves the first hint of mortal disease; when conscience speaks, after many checks and thwartings, and brings to the surface some buried sin; when in some moment of quickened feeling we breathe from the heart a prayer often said with the lips, no longer as in a deaf ear, or to a distant Person, but rather as a cry for real help, a longing for actual communion with One felt to be near to us as our own soul; at such times we do feel that the World cannot be our rest, that its love must not be our choice. Come weal or woe, come glory or shame, come joy or grief, here—I must have a Father, I must have a Saviour, I must have a Comforter, who changes not—a *Friend closer than a brother*¹, whom no circumstance can estrange, and over whom Death itself shall have no power.

It is thus that the baser love is cast out by the holier. Not by resolving against the World, but by *feeling after*² and by calling in God. Not by self-made distinctions between that which is and is not

¹ Prov. xviii. 24.

² Acts xvii. 27.

the world; not by giving up a few amusements, in the Pharisee fashion, and going aside, with a few congenial spirits, into a society calling itself religious, only to find that the world itself, the real world, has gone with us into our seclusion, still to be encountered or still to be yielded to; not by emptying, but by filling, the vessel of the soul's affection—even by receiving into it that spiritual water, His own gift Christ calls it, which shall be in us an exhaustless well *springing up into everlasting life*¹. Then shall the love of the World be cast out of us by the mightier love of God: the expulsive power of a new affection shall be proved in us, as in saints of all time, by a change as real as it is secret; and for every vile sordid passion effectually nailed to Christ's Cross, we shall receive back a fresh influx of Divine Love, alone satisfying here, because alone abiding for ever.

¹ John iv. 14.

TUESDAY BEFORE EASTER,

March 23, 1869.

IV.

THE MORAL GLORY OF CHRIST.

JOHN i. 14.

And we beheld His glory.

THE Week which we are spending in these solemn Services takes its name from Suffering. Suffering wrought to its utmost conceivable acuteness of agony, is the spectacle on which, day after day, in the solemn yet simple Liturgy of our Church—in special readings, various in their detail yet monotonous in their sadness—from Old Testament and New, from Prophet, from Apostle, from Evangelist—we are bidden to fix the mind's eye and concentrate the soul's attention.

It seems necessary, if we would make the contemplation profitable, that we should frequently turn aside to ponder with ourselves this question,

Who and What is the Sufferer?

We all know that the sight of suffering affects and ought to affect us differently in different cases. The rank and birth, the history and character, the innocence, the dignity, the piety of the victim—the fact of his dying by treachery, by perjury, for conscience' sake, to save his country, in the cause of his God—may elevate what would otherwise be the execution of a felon into the martyrdom of a saint, and awaken in the beholder, not the instinctive pity of a common humanity, but the admiration, the reverence, the profound sympathy or the burning indignant zeal, of one who sees in the dying man his ideal of holiness, of devotion, of moral glory.

I do not wish that we should give to the Spectacle of this season no more of our hearts, and no more of our souls, than is drawn from us perforce by the actual, carnal, corporeal anguish. We ought, again and again, to question ourselves about the Person. When Jesus came into Jerusalem for the last time, to be betrayed and crucified, St Matthew says, *All the city was moved, saying, Who is this¹?* Let us devote this evening's meditation to that question. We will assume—we will not prove, we do not need to prove in this Congregation—what He was, what He is, in His original Deity, in His perfect Co-equality, Co-

¹ Matt. xxi. 10.

eternity, and Oneness with the One Invisible God. We shall ask, rather, this evening, What was He as Man? in what manner, with what particular characteristics, did the Divine Nature express itself in human quality? what was He, our Sacrifice and Propitiation, in character, spirit, and life, below—that we may both honour Him as we ought, and also set ourselves to follow His example and to walk in His steps?

St John describes, in the brief words of the text, the impression made upon him by living for about three years in the company, in the companionship, of Jesus Christ.

It is plain, I think, that the Glory of which St John here speaks was chiefly, though not exclusively, what we may call a Moral Glory: that is, a forthshining of Divine perfection, not in the form of power alone, but rather of wisdom and goodness, of truth and love. *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt (tabernacled) among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*

We know what it is to us to live with a good man; how things evil seem to shrivel up and disappear in his presence; how everything that there is in us of good is quickened and strengthened by the contact of his purity. St Paul speaks of this as (in a

far higher sense) the effect of contemplating, and studying, and communing with Christ. *We all, with open (unveiled) face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord*—viewing the character of God Himself in that faultless Mirror, which is Jesus Christ—*are changed into the same image from glory to glory*¹. *We shall be like Him*, St John writes, *for we shall see Him as He is*². The future sight of Christ will complete the transformation: it begins here, in the sight of Him by faith. May it please God to assist us this evening in the endeavour to behold something of Christ's glory; to see Him as He was—therefore as He is—in the perfectness of His character; and so in becoming like Him; in casting away the old self, and *putting on the new man*³, which is Christ Himself.

I would have you, for a few moments, close the Bible and reflect upon it as a whole. For what is the Bible, but the Book which pourtrays and which embodies Jesus Christ? In particular, hold the four Gospels in your hand—shut, but well-read—and tell me what is your idea of Jesus Christ, as there manifested, as thence known.

I am confident that you feel, if the words might be pardoned, that His work—the work of His Atonement, the work of His Obedience, the work of His

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 18.² 1 John iii. 2.³ Eph. iv. 24. Col. iii. 10.

Example, the work of His constructed Church, and the work of His individual dealing—that His work, I say, is the least part of Him. You feel that, with Him as with men also, being is more than doing. *To behold as in a glass the very glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*¹, is more, higher, more excellent, more inspiring, than even to read of a world-wide Atonement, or even to be assured of a personal acceptance. The latter is a fountain of life; the former is a boundless, measureless deep.

We will not try to define the character accurately, or to gather into one poor human taper of description all the rays of that manifold Glory. But we will endeavour to say a few things concerning it—true, however inadequate.

How entirely, how wonderfully, is the Son of God, the Word, the Only-begotten, the Light of Light, set before us in Holy Scripture as the Son of Man! Nothing strikes us more forcibly when we think of Him. It was so unlike an Angel's descent upon a world not his own. *Verily He took not on Him the nature of Angels, but He took on Him the seed of Abraham*². How complete, how marvellous, was the incorporation! He was *in all things made like unto His brethren*³. When He decided, in the Eternal

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 18.

² Heb. ii. 16.

³ Heb. ii. 17.

Counsels, not to cling to the original Deity, but to *make Himself empty*¹, as St Paul writes, for us men and for our salvation, how thoroughly, how absolutely, did He do it! I need not remind you of the outward visible signs of His union with the suffering, with the fallen; not of the birth and the growth, of the infancy and the boyhood, of the shop and the synagogue, of the eating and the hungering, of the sleeping and the waking, of the *seamless coat* and the cruel shameful stripping—not of these things, for they are but the shell and husk of humanity: they make not the life, they are not the man. I would go deeper. I would bid you think how Jesus Christ felt for and felt with mankind. How He went, in everything, to the truth, to the reality, to the very base and rock of our life. This, I think, was why He so much hated hypocrisy. He hated it, you might say, almost more than sin. That, indeed, was impossible: no man could abhor sin as Christ did. But hypocrisy is sin; it is that contradiction of the thing that is, that upsetting and reversal of existences, which might almost be made a definition of sin. Everything which was true, real, natural—even though it was caused by sin, even though it was sin which made it bitter and which made it suffering—had the compassion of Christ at

¹ Phil. ii. 7.

once, because He saw that it was real, and because He knew that it was vital.

I have thus hastened into the very heart of the subject, because I cannot bear, on such a subject, to methodize and systematize. It seems to me to contain in itself a world of thought—this thoroughness of the Divine Humanity. It seems to express, as nothing else can, the suffering and the struggling, the sympathy and the conflict, of our Lord Jesus Christ *in the days of His flesh*¹.

1. Because He was very Man, therefore He was tempted.

The Temptation of Christ, lasting (St Mark and St Luke seem to say) all the forty days and nights of this long annual Lent²—rising to its climax in that threefold assault of which St Matthew and St Luke preserve something of the detail—was a real Temptation. It has no strength in it, and no comfort, and no admonition, for us, unless it were so. We cannot indeed explain to ourselves or to one another, how He who was *without sin*³, *in whom* (as He Himself said) the devil *had nothing*⁴, could have *suffered being tempted*⁵. We might have thought that temptation would fall off from Him painless as well as ineffectual.

¹ Heb. v. 7. ² Mark i. 13. Luke iv. 2. ³ Heb. iv. 15.

⁴ John xiv. 30.

⁵ Heb. ii. 18.

But we are sure, we are sure from His own Word, that it was not so. Satan has coarser and more vulgar solicitations for the sensual and the earthly-minded, and he has more refined and subtle seductions for the spiritual and the unworldly. To Christ he presented even bodily lures in a sublimed and spiritualized form. If he bade Him satisfy hunger, it was doubtless on the plea of saving a life for duty, and proving a Messiahship by miracle. If he bade Him gratify ambition, it was on the plea of avoiding centuries of conflict, and winning a world for God by one concession. If he bade Him risk the descent from the giddy height of the Temple-battlement, it was on the safeguard of a Divine promise, and for the conviction of a sin-ruined world. Such snares, so laid, might have caught *the very elect*¹. We are sure of this, that they did derive, even for Christ, a reality of meaning, though an insufficiency of attraction, from the thoroughness of His incorporation with our humanity.

And when the devil, foiled and vanquished at last, *departed from Him*, it was but *for a season*². From time to time throughout His earthly life the temptation recurred and was repeated. It was repeated in the form of self-sparing and of shrinking from suffering, when Peter, who had just confessed Him, rebuked

¹ Matt. xxiv. 24.

² Luke iv. 13.

Him for predicting betrayal and crucifixion. There was that in Him, or He had not been very Man, to which ease was naturally pleasant and pain instinctively formidable. Therefore He felt the suggestion of love as an attempt to seduce—saw in the human friend (for the moment) a disguised enemy, and answered, *Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me*¹!

The temptation was repeated, in the garden of Gethsemane, when the bitterness of the full-mixed cup was made present to Him as a motive for its refusal, and when it cost Him an agony of tears and blood to gain the latest, the decisive victory. All this sprang out of the thoroughness of the Humanity. It was *in the days of His flesh*, an Apostle writes, that *He offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared*².

First then we have drawn from the subject this characteristic of Christ—the firmness, the resoluteness, of His self-control. There would have been nothing in it if He had not been very Man. There would have been no proof, no reality, of virtue, if He had not been *tempted in all points like as we are*. If

¹ Matt. xvi. 22, 23.

² Heb. v. 7.

hunger, if thirst, if pain, if torture, if scorn and hatred, if mockery and outrage, had not been as real to Him, as keen in their edge, as close in their access, as they are to us; then His superiority to them, His triumph over them, would have been merely a scene in a play, carrying no comfort and uttering no call. *Which of you convinceth me of sin*¹? implies, if it has any meaning, not an insensibility to, but a victory over, temptation. The purity, the holiness, the spotless innocence, of Christ's character, is the foundation of all else, because it was a virtue really tried, and under real trial victorious. He who bids us fight under His banner against sin and the devil, is able to say to us first of all, *Be of good cheer—I have overcome*²!

2. Then, out of this perfect self-control there springs, in the second place, an absolute self-forgetfulness. Self-denial, even self-sacrifice, is an inadequate word for the thing spoken of. It never occurred to our Lord Jesus Christ to think of Himself—I mean, as to self-indulgence, self-pleasing, self-consideration. It did occur to Him, for it was a duty—it was necessary to truth, necessary to His work—to remember who He was, and to say plainly whence He came. Side by side with the most entire self-forgetfulness we find in Him the loftiest self-assertion. *I and my*

¹ John viii. 46.

² John xvi. 33.

*Father are one*¹, was the utterance of the selfsame Person of whom it is written in Holy Scripture that *even Christ pleased not Himself*². You see the consistency of the two. Falsehood, denial or disguise of the thing that is, there could not be in Him that is true. If He came down from Heaven, and knew it, there could be no virtue, no humility, in concealing it. It was a fact. It was of the essence of His work as the Saviour and Mediator. But, when it was a question of claiming, in present exercise, that Sovereignty which belongs to Deity—of accepting that service, of insisting upon, or allowing, that homage, which is of right the Creator's—then He took the lowest place. *The Son of Man*, He said, *came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many*³. *I am among you as He that serveth*⁴.

It was a description of His life. No servant, no toiling, working, labouring man, ever led the life of Jesus Christ in its unrest, in its homelessness, in its discomfort. From early morning till a late evening He was the Minister, He was the Teacher, He was the Physician, He was the Servant, of all. No door was ever shut where He sate at meat. No humblest,

¹ John x. 30.

² Rom. xv. 3.

³ Matt. xx. 28.

⁴ Luke xxii. 27.

most sinful, most outcast person was ever told that He was busy, that He was eating, or that He was at rest. *He came down from heaven not to do His own will¹. His meat was to do the will of Him that sent Him, and to finish His work².*

3. This self-control, and this self-forgetfulness, led, in the third place, to a remarkable gravity of deportment and to great plainness of speech.

The business on which He came was serious even to severity. The Incarnate Word, on His way to a Sacrifice of Propitiation, had no time and no heart for playfulness. We may read in the Gospel how once and again *Jesus wept³*: we never once read in the Gospel that *Jesus laughed*. We read of the sigh of Jesus even in healing⁴; we read of the inward groan of Jesus as He drew near a grave which He was instantly to open⁵: nowhere, never, do we find that a smile passed over His face, or that a sound of merriment fell from His lips. To Him, at all events, *jesting was not convenient⁶*.

And thus was it also with the plainness, with the directness, of His speech. It was impossible for the holy and devoted Saviour to think well, or to speak softly, of the self-righteous Pharisee, the courtly

¹ John vi. 38.

² John iv. 34.

³ John xi. 35.

⁴ Mark vii. 34.

⁵ John xi. 33, 38.

⁶ Eph. v. 4.

Herodian, or the infidel Sadducee. It would not have been true. The only thing which could make even a moralist, much more a religious man, shrink from denouncing hypocrisy, worldliness, and unbelief, would be the consciousness of something in himself which would render such language, however just, unbecoming, because inconsistent, in him. In Jesus Christ no such obstacle could have place. He was the Judge of men, as well as the Saviour: what He saw, He must characterize; what He knew, He must speak.

And do we not all feel that the power of anger, of strong disapproval, of righteous indignation, is a necessary ingredient in the perfect man? For lack of this quality, what do we not suffer in this bad world? How will men of bone and sinew stand by and look on while a child, while a woman, is outraged, tortured, murdered! How will an ingenious sophistry invent excuses for diabolical crimes, and a morbid effeminate philanthropy give a thousand reasons why the villain, why the demon, should not pay the righteous penalty in the only punishment which the viler nature can feel! This is not manhood: this is not the Humanity of Jesus Christ.

4. But we hasten over this necessary but less winning feature in the *moral glory* of Jesus, to that

which all have anticipated as the crown and sum of the whole—His gentleness, His sympathy, His patience, His love.

He reserved all His severity for one sin—the sin which calls itself virtue—that deep ingrained hypocrisy of which the eyes are all outward. For the sinner, world-convicted and self-condemning, Jesus Christ had nothing but compassion. With publicans and sinners He would sit at the social table—not to palliate the sin, but to open to the sinner the one chance of reformation. He loved to compare Himself to the Physician, whose only business is with the sick¹. He would sometimes draw upon the experiences of family life, and make men weep as He told them of some erring, straying, exiled son, whose thoughts even in the far country revisit the forfeited home, and whose return, in misery and penitence, will certainly be hailed and welcomed by any father in whose bosom there beats the heart of a man². Sometimes He would picture to His hearers a mountain-side in their own Judea or Galilee, on which the shepherd misses one sheep from his flock, and counts that loss of one reason enough for deserting the ninety and nine in his quest of it³. Thus He taught

¹ Matt. ix. 10—12.

² Luke xv. 17, 20.

³ Matt. xviii. 12. Luke xv. 4.

men the practical purposes of His Mission; taught them at once the peril of a sin and the value of a soul; made them feel that there is a worse thing than sickness, a worse thing than sorrow, a worse thing than death; and that He who gave His life-time to comfort the one, would much more give His life to atone for and reclaim from the other.

We can well understand how He who thus dealt with that sin which had no counterpart in Himself, would deal with the suffering, in mind and body, of which He was to furnish the most memorable example. What department of suffering did He not feel for? The hungry, the sick, the deformed, the blind, the deaf—the accidentally maimed, the ceremonially defiled—the father calling Him to his child's deathbed, the widow following her son's funeral, the mother anguish-stricken for her demoniac daughter—for each and for all He had a heart of human pity, and a hand of Divine help; bidding all who would come after Him not to harden their faces against pain because it is temporal; not to plead the greater urgency of a soul's disease as a reason for indifference to maladies and wants and miseries of this life; not so to anticipate eternity as to overlook time, nor to forget that He who came to die for our Redemption

was also, above all men, the Physician too and the *Saviour of the body*¹.

5. I will add, in one word, this fifth and last feature of our Lord's perfect character—that He never suffered charity to eclipse piety, nor duty to set aside or smother devotion.

Between two days of incessant, unrelenting toil, in the service of God by teaching and of man by healing, He interposed, not rarely, a whole night of profound meditation, communion, and prayer. *It came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. He withdrew Himself*, St Luke says—and the original gives it, *was in the habit of withdrawing Himself—into the wilderness, and prayed*². At certain times of more especial weariness, interruption, and sadness, He proposed to His Disciples a retreat into a desert place, where they might rest both body and soul in seclusion and prayer³.

Mysterious as is the whole subject of the Prayers of Christ—difficult as it may be to conceive of Him who is God, approaching Him who is God, for any other purpose (certainly) than that of an intercourse of mere communion—we yet feel, every one of us, that without devotion the glory of Christ's character

¹ Eph. v. 23.

² Luke v. 16. vi. 12.

³ Mark vi. 31.

would have fallen short of perfection. Little as we ourselves may value Prayer; short and cold and perfunctory as may be our own exercises of worship; we do feel—and not least the least religious of us—that it is a poor, debased, stunted life which is lived only for this world; that even useful business, even works of charity, cannot supersede, but rather increase the necessity of drawing down God's blessing upon the man who would do good in his generation; that there is a height, could we but reach it, only to be attained by living above earth; and that it is the first duty, the highest glory too, of a spiritual being, to be in daily connection and communication with Him in whom he *lives and moves and has his being*.

Thus we all recognize the evident delight of Christ in acts of devotion—His preference of these to food and sleep, to exercise and relaxation, to human converse or intercourse or sympathy—as a necessary part of the perfection which makes Him what He is. We could not regard Him as our Example, as our Lord, as the Very and Eternal Word *tabernacling among us full of grace and truth*¹, if He had not this point of pre-eminence making Him *all glorious within*². We want not only a Leader of assiduous diligence, of unwearied energy, of infinite tenderness,

¹ John i. 14.

² Psalm xlv. 13.

of universal charity ; we want One who, while in this world, was manifestly not of it ; One who, coming to us from Heaven, was in Heaven still even while Incarnate¹ ; One who *can be touched* indeed *with a feeling of our infirmities*², but who Himself, even in the days of His flesh, lived a life of Divine communion, strengthening Himself for His self-denials and His sufferings by fresh and ever fresh draughts of the light and the air and the purity of His own Home in Heaven.

Thus did He *fulfil all righteousness*³. Not in His unquestioning obedience alone to every commandment and every ordinance of God ; not alone in His perfect performance of every part, every iota, of the work set Him ; the work of Atonement, of Example, of founding and inspiring and influencing the Church which is His Body. Not thus only. Rather by being that which is perfect—that which is complete and entire in beauty and glory—in purity, in self-forgetfulness, in truth, in tenderness, in piety. Being such, we can admire Him, we can adore Him, we can aspire to Him, we can call Him in, we can live by Him, we can worship Him. Being such, He is not only the Redeemer who died for our sins and rose again for our justification ; He is also our Lord

¹ John iii. 13.

² Heb. iv. 15.

³ Matt. iii. 15.

and our God : not done with, when we are forgiven ; not done with, when we are once reconciled : but rather the ever-present Friend and Helper of our lives, who shall first *guide us with His counsel*, and then at last *receive us into His glory*¹. So let us daily think of Him, study Him, seek Him, commune with Him : and then we too, beholding His Glory—beholding, as in the mirror of His countenance, the glory of the Eternal—shall grow by degrees *into the same image from glory to glory*², and *be satisfied, when we awake, with His likeness*³.

¹ Psalm lxxiii. 24.

² 2 Cor. iii. 18.

³ Psalm xvii. 15.

WEDNESDAY BEFORE EASTER,

March 24, 1869.

V.

CHRIST MADE PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERING.

HEBREWS ii. 10.

*It became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom
are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to
make the Captain of their salvation perfect through
sufferings.*

IN what was said last night upon the words, *We beheld His glory*—in that poor feeble effort to catch something of the Divine beauty of the mind which was in Christ Jesus—you were quick to notice one great, one intentional omission. We spoke of the self-command of Christ in resisting, of the self-forgetfulness of Christ in doing, of the gravity of Christ's deportment, of the plain dealing of Christ with gainsayers, of the tenderness of Christ with sufferers, of the piety of Christ towards His Father in

Heaven. But we reserved one point—too prominent, too important, to be touched upon amongst a multitude—the longsuffering of Christ under wounds and griefs and agonies of His own; the mysterious *perfecting* (as the text calls it) which came to Him, and could only come, *through suffering*. We have kept this for to-night; hoping and praying that God will make it interesting, and impressive, and salutary, to the souls here gathered before Him, through the fast-approaching Crucifixion-morrow, and through the days of the years of the pilgrimage which may follow.

This, I think, we shall all say—that, considering what earth, and what human life is, a Saviour who had never suffered would scarcely have been the Saviour for whom the heart of man is athirst, would scarcely have been what the Prophet calls Him—

*The Desire of all Nations*¹.

There is an irritability, there is a suspiciousness, in sorrow, which makes it slow to believe in sympathy, in comprehension. I have found mourners at once imperious in demanding, and fastidious in accepting, consolation. There is commonly, in the language of deep grief, this sad, this discouraging refrain—

You do not, you cannot, understand me.

¹ Hag. ii. 7.

To be a *son of consolation*¹, a man must have been in some way a sufferer. And seeing that human sorrow is infinite in its forms and in its accesses and in its workings, it became Him who would be the Saviour of the World to gather up into His one Person all the griefs and all the anguishes—or specimens, at least, of all—which any man, anywhere, ever, should groan under. We can quite understand, in this way, why the Apostle says, in the words here before us,

It became God to make Christ suffer.

It is not altogether easy to see why he should speak of *perfecting* through sufferings ; why, elsewhere, he should speak of Christ *learning obedience through the things which He suffered*, and so *being made perfect*². We are quite sure that one who could describe Christ as the Apostle to the Hebrews has described Him in his 1st chapter, as the *Son of God*, the *Heir of all things*, the *Maker of the worlds*, the *Upholder of all things by the word of His power*—as Himself, in the language of clear Messianic prediction, *Lord and God*³—cannot mean to say that there was an imperfection needing thus to be removed, or a want of perfectness needing thus to be supplied. When he speaks of Christ as *perfected through sufferings*, as *learning by suffering*, it must be with reference to two

¹ Acts iv. 36.

² Heb. v. 8, 9.

³ Heb. i. 2, 3, 8, 10.

things—the drawing out of a perfection which was there, and the finishing of a satisfaction which was needed by His people.

We have earnestly asserted on former occasions—and may God keep us evermore steadfast in this faith—the necessity of Christ's Sacrifice in its strongest yet simplest sense, as an Atonement and Propitiation for sin. *When He had by Himself purged our sins*¹, is the brief but pregnant account of it by the Apostle whose words are before us.

To-night we would rather view it in the light in which the text places it, as a necessary part of the incorporation and union with His Church; as the consummation too of that *moral glory* which shone forth in every part and every feature of the character of the Divine Saviour.

Perfect through sufferings.

1. What was the life of Christ but a life of suffering?

Perhaps you will point to a tranquil Home, an untroubled Youth, the anxious, devoted, reverent nurture of a saintly Mother's love. You will urge that, for thirty years of a life reaching but to thirty and three, we read of nothing hostile, nothing precarious, nothing unrestful. You will add, that of

¹ Heb. i. 2.

those trials which make so large a chapter of human woe—loss of friends, of parents, of wife or child—Jesus Christ had no experience ever below. You might draw the inference, hasty but not unnatural, that, on the whole, the earthly life of Jesus was as little a life of suffering as any of which we keep the record. He never lay, so far as we know, on a bed of sickness: He never mourned, in His own family, beside a bed of death: He never felt the feebleness, the impotence, the imbecility, of a protracted, an unlovely old age.

We must grant some of these things, and then remind you—

First, that some sorrows of life are but the shadows of greater joys; that Jesus Christ could not have tasted the anxieties, without drinking also of the pleasures, of a home of His own: therefore, in escaping from certain griefs, He was deprived also of certain far greater joys, which became not the Man of Sorrows.

Next, that some other trials of common human life were quite unsuitable to His office—if I might so express it, to His idea. It would not have become Him to run out the term of existence—as though He clung to it for its own sake—to its *threescore years and ten or fourscore years*¹. There was nothing in earthly

¹ Psalm xc. 10.

old age congruous or consistent with the plan, with the duty, of *the Word made flesh*¹. In three and thirty years He had done all ; had obeyed, had toiled, had suffered, had atoned. His Home was above : when He had done all, it was better that He should be there !

Look then—it is more profitable, it is also more true—at the cup of suffering which He did drain.

(1) I will speak to you of His loneliness. There is a loneliness which vulgar natures feel—a loneliness which makes conscience flame, and goads the imprisoned felon into madness. There is a loneliness, too, of which only great souls are sensible ; a loneliness felt doubly in crowds ; a loneliness, not of bodily presence, but of unintelligible aspirations, misinterpreted motives, and crushed or trampled sympathies. It was this last which made one of the sorest of Christ's life's sorrows. *He came to His own*—it was true in all senses—it was true as (St John wrote it) of the world, it was true of His nation, it was true of His home—*He came unto His own, and His own received Him not*². When, in the discharge of such *business of His Father* as could be done in childhood, He *tarried behind* to fill His thirsting mind in Jerusalem from the wisdom of its Rabbis, He was reproved, He was re-

¹ John i. 14.

² John i. 11.

proached, by her who best loved Him—*Son, why hast Thou thus dealt with us*¹? His answer was accepted, was *pondered*, was treasured; it was not understood, even by her. This was a sample of the life's isolation. *Neither did His brethren believe on Him*², writes St John. Even at home He was *an alien to His mother's children*³. Of Him, doubtless, as of His type in old time, brothers and sisters said oftentimes, *Behold, this dreamer cometh*⁴! If you have ever seen the effect produced upon a child, a human child, by ignorant ridicule given in return for some eager, earnest questioning; if you have ever observed that daunting of the hope, that defeating of the intellectual effort—yet more, that sense of wrong done and pain inflicted; you may have some idea, a faint but true one, of the suffering of the one Divine Childhood, from this single, least obvious cause, its spiritual isolation and loneliness.

You might have thought that this particular source of suffering would have been stanchd and dried up when once He was free to choose His companionship; when once He had emerged from the narrow home at Nazareth, and had begun to associate with Himself the future Ministers and Apostles of His Kingdom.

¹ Luke ii. 48.

² John vii. 5.

³ Psalm lxix. 8.

⁴ Gen. xxxvii. 19.

To them indeed He could speak as to friends: but what a record have they themselves left of the intelligence, of the sympathy, with which they heard Him! Again and again we read, in their own words, He said thus and thus; but *they understood none of these things—this saying was hid from them—they knew not the things which were spoken*¹. Not until after the Resurrection could He begin really to *open their understanding*² to Scripture: even when they saw Him risen, *some still doubted*³.

(2) There was one peculiar trial which we must endeavour to enter into; and that was the perpetual suspicion of arrogance and blasphemy. We remarked last night—it is an important though obvious reflection—that our Lord Jesus Christ, however humble, was true. He *could not deny Himself*⁴. He could not, to win acceptance—He could not, to avoid reproach—forget or disguise His own Origin. He who knew that He was *from above*, could not pretend to be *from beneath*⁵; He who knew that *God was His Father*⁶ could not even seem to say that, before He was born, He was not⁷. Hence a special distress, not always thought of as it should be.

¹ Luke xviii. 34.

² Luke xxiv. 45.

³ Matt. xxviii. 17.

⁴ 2 Tim. ii. 13.

⁵ John viii. 23.

⁶ John v. 18.

⁷ John i. 15. viii. 58.

In these days it is not altogether penal to be heterodox. We have reached an age of the Church, in which boldness of speech, originality of thought, power (it is sometimes called) of mind, is esteemed far above its value, far above truth. The one thing which a Preacher, which a Writer, has to dread—if he would succeed, if he would be listened to—is the charge of tameness, of commonplaceness, of dulness. Better, we say, smart error than modest truth. Therefore we can scarcely estimate the pang which a charge of heresy, much more of presumption, struck into the heart of *the elders*; men who feared God, and *walked humbly, mournfully, before the Lord of Hosts*¹. To be accused of arrogance, of falsehood, of blasphemy, of being in league with the devil, of doing His mighty works by the help of God's enemy², was a trouble, was a sorrow to Jesus Christ, of which meaner, commoner, vainer minds can have no conception.

I put these sufferings far above toil, above hunger, above homelessness, for Jesus; touchingly, pathetically, as He spoke even of this last, when He said to one who would follow Him—

*The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head*³.

¹ Micah vi. 8. Mal. iii. 14.

² Matt. xii. 24.

³ Matt. ix. 20.

(3) And we must add one more to these sorrows of the life—beyond loneliness, beyond reproach, in its bitterness—the sense of actual treachery lurking in His little fold ; the presence of one malign influence, of one perfidious friendship, of one soul (amongst the innermost Twelve) gradually hardening itself into hatred, ripening itself for ruin. O, how must the thought—

Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil¹—

have poisoned the peace and wrung the very heart of Jesus, though it could not shake the steadfastness of His resolve to *overcome* even that *evil*, were it possible, *with good*!²

(4) And yet, my brethren, there was one sorrow wider, larger, broader, if not deeper, even than this. It was this indeed—we scarcely know how to say it—it was this which brought Him down, it was this which made Him take flesh, it was this which caused the life which it darkened. He must have felt it already—He must have felt it in Heaven. *The free gift*, St Paul writes, *was of (the result of, caused by—strange words!) many offences unto justification*³. Sin brought Christ down—He was *the free gift*:

¹ John vi. 70.

² Rom. xii. 21.

³ Rom. v. 16, Ἐκ πολλῶν παραπτωμάτων.

sin clothed him in flesh, then saddened, then slew Him.

Sin was *the* sorrow. The sight of sin, the knowledge of sin, the presence of sin—the daily presence, in anger and suspicion, in vainglory and hypocrisy, in disease, deformity, leprosy, death—the prescience, too, of sin's consequence, of *the second death*¹.

You may trace up all Christ's sufferings to this single source—sin. It was this which afflicted, tormented, at last crucified Him; it was through this that He was made perfect.

(5) As the end drew on, there set in new sufferings. We are to commemorate them to-morrow—we are commemorating them now.

Some of these speak to all men. The bodily inflictions—the hunger and thirst, the mockery and buffeting, the spitting and scourging, the thorns and the nails, the shameful Cross, the long hours of hanging between earth and Heaven, between living and dying, the taunts and execrations, the desertion and flight of His own—human nature can feel thus far: the simple narrative of these things, if it were new, if it were of to-day, if it were studied, if it were realized, would draw tears from hardened men. If Jesus were a Philanthropist only, if He were but an innocent

¹ Rev. ii. 11. xx. 14.

Victim of man's prejudice and bigotry, if He were a Patriot only or a Saint or a Martyr, we should all feel it then. It is because He is more—because He is our Saviour, because He is our Lord and our God—it is therefore that we feel it not.

In reality, however, these things scarcely touch the real point. The suffering of Jesus was not only, not chiefly, as a Man. It was far more, far more exquisitely, as the Divine Man—let us speak plainly, as God—that He suffered. It was in the sin-bearing, more than in the sin-suffering, that He felt, and that He groaned. It was not only that sin was all round Him—that He saw a world infected, ruined, destroyed by it—an Apostle says, *He was made sin*¹. Think of that. The Holy One was *made sin*. Put it at the very lowest possible point—you cannot get rid of the Sacrifice, of the sin-taking and sin-carrying, which is our Gospel, which is our hope. Argue not—*only believe*². You will want it one day: think again—you want it now!

2. The text tells us that through these sufferings God made Christ perfect. *Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience through the things which He suffered*³. These sufferings exercised, practised, manifested, left on record, the perfectness which was in Him.

¹ 2 Cor. v. 21.

² Mark v. 36.

³ Heb. v. 8.

(1) Was there ever sorrow like His sorrow, or suffering like His suffering, in its submissiveness?

A dying Bishop asked his Chaplain, *Have you ever preached a Sermon on the text, Thy will be done? How did you explain it?* When the other replied—*Just so*, he said: *that is the meaning*: and added, in a voice choked with tears, *But it is hard—very hard sometimes—to say it.*

Christ did say it. *If this cup may not pass away from me except I drink it, Thy will be done*¹. The cup did not pass—He did drink it: it was the cup not only of pain, not only of torture, not only of death—it was the hiding of a Father's countenance; it was death not only in human loneliness but under Divine desertion: so, not otherwise—not in a gentler form, not with every solace and every mitigation, but thus in darkest, bitterest, uttermost desolation—did Christ our Lord *taste death for every man*². And yet He could say, *Thy will be done.*

(2) Suffering often makes us selfish. The frame racked with pain can scarcely admit a thought save for itself. It seems wonderful to us that all the world is not sorry! Of those who approach us we demand this first and midst and last of all, that they feel for us. We reject the rough touch, we resent the critical

¹ Matt. xxvi. 42.

² Heb. ii. 9.

word, we expect every suggestion to be adapted to our circumstance, and every voice to be attuned to our mood. Only Christ, and a few who have learned of Him, could be unselfish in suffering. He thought of every one—thought of the imperilled souls that would not watch¹—thought of the endangered bodies which must be pleaded for with His captors²—thought of the falling sinning Disciple who must be recalled with a look to penitence³—thought of the pitying women, whose wailing should be rather for themselves and their children⁴—thought of the bereaved Mother whose home must be provided⁵—thought of the agonized dying sinner beside Him, who must be comforted with the promise of a Paradise opened⁶.

(3) Even a submissive, even an unselfish sorrow, might yet be wanting in dignity and in elevation. There have been those who bowed themselves under *the mighty Hand*⁷—there have been those who thought themselves least, and even in dying hours remembered their brethren—yet were lacking in the calmness of their retrospect and in the confidence of their prospect. It was not so with Christ. Whatever the deprivation of conscious joy, whatever the disconsolateness of

¹ Matt. xxvi. 40, 41.

² John xviii. 8, 9.

³ Luke xxii. 61.

⁴ Luke xxiii. 27, 28.

⁵ John xix. 26, 27.

⁶ Luke xxiii. 43.

⁷ 1 Pet. v. 6.

spiritual feeling, there was no misgiving as to the completeness of His Work or as to the availableness of His Propitiation. Each separate item of prophetic prediction was carefully pondered and exactly fulfilled. *Knowing that all things else were now accomplished*—all things written in Holy Scripture concerning the life and the death of Him that should come—that there might be left no jot and no tittle of type or sign, of Psalm or Prophecy, incomplete or unregarded, *He saith, I thirst*¹. And when this too was done, then at last He said, *It is finished*—then at last, in peace and faith, He *bowed His head, and gave up the ghost*². Thus He taught, for all time, the importance of God and the insignificance of the present—the essential difference between safety and transport—the blessedness of all those *who die in the Lord*³, even though there be, to the very last, neither beckoning angel, opening sky, nor visible glory.

My brethren, the text tells us that all this was done, not for Himself, but for us. It was *in bringing many sons unto glory* that God thus perfected through sufferings the Captain of their salvation. It was to make Him one with us. It was to create, it was to establish, it was to prove, that relationship, that brotherhood, which is between Christ and His re-

¹ John xix. 28.² John xix. 30.³ Rev. xiv. 13.

deemed. It was to enable Him to feel with us in suffering, to succour us in temptation, to exercise the Church's trust, and to lead the Church's worship¹. It was to encourage us to trust Him as our Friend, to use Him as our Priest, to follow Him as our Commander, to live because He died, and to die because He lives. *We are sons of God now*, and, though *it doth not yet appear what we shall be*², we know that God Himself is engaged in bringing us to glory.

O, my brethren, let us not frustrate this purpose of Divine love. What is *Glory*? It is the sight of God, it is the presence of God, it is the companionship of God—it is the likeness, it is the lost, restored image of God Himself—for ever. It was to give us this that Christ came, that Christ suffered and wept, that Christ died and rose. How are we dealing with this blessed Hope? Where is our earnestness in seeking, where is our watchfulness in keeping, where is our holy jealousy of forfeiting, this glory which a perfected Lord won for us through suffering? Let not this serious season end, let not this Holy Week close—let us not stand to-morrow, on the Crucifixion Day, to see Christ die—let us not presume to meet to say to one another, on Easter Day, *The Lord is risen*—

¹ Heb. ii. 12.

² 1 John iii. 2.

without some anxious questionings meanwhile, some deep searchings of heart, some resolute expulsions of sins, some determined efforts after a better, braver, holier life! Let us not expect, let us not wish, to trifle or play along that road which Jesus Christ marked with great drops of His blood! *If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him*¹. Suffering of some kind is the condition of our perfection. Christ also Himself was made perfect through sufferings.

Let suffering come, and change, and work, and go, as God shall order. He has charge of us, He chastens and blesses, He can make the very stroke healing, and pour the oil of His benediction upon the wound which He has opened. Only may He not leave us, not give us up, not cease to deal with us! All in gentleness, if it please Him—if need be, in merciful correction—so let Him guide, so let Him speed us! At last may we be of those whom He has prepared for His presence—of those sons whom He has brought safe to glory!

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 12.

THURSDAY BEFORE EASTER,
March 25, 1869.

VI.

DEATH THE REMEDY OF CHRIST'S LONELINESS.

ST JOHN xii. 24.

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat
fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but
if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*

IT is thus that Christ Himself speaks of the importance, the necessity, of His own Death.

He has made His solemn entry into the City where He is now to suffer.

An unwonted stir accompanies, this time, His visit to Jerusalem.

He had been there as a Boy of twelve years, and no man thought of Him then. He might sit in the Temple-courts, hearing the doctors and asking them questions: no immediate fame published His presence:

His Mother must seek Him for herself, if she would find Him : He was not preaching, He was not healing, He was not working then : He was only preparing, He was only learning. He had stayed behind to learn, He accompanied her home to obey¹.

But now it was otherwise. For about three years He had come forward as the Teacher, as the Prophet, as more than the Prophet, of Israel. He had drawn upon Himself, when He periodically visited Jerusalem, first the notice and then the hostility of the orthodox. Again and again He had withdrawn Himself, till His hour should come²: now His hour is come, and He is here to die.

At this moment of extreme peril, when the fury of the Pharisees has been inflamed for its last vengeance by the public entry and by the popular confession, there occurred an incident noticed only by St John ; an application on the part of some Gentile proselytes, who had come up to worship at this Passover, that they might be permitted to *see Jesus*³. There was a doubt about it. Philip, to whom they first spoke, had heard his Master say, on more than one occasion, that He was come upon earth to minister personally only to Israel⁴: these Gentiles were outside that pale:

¹ Luke ii. 51.

² John vii. 8. viii. 20.

³ John xii. 20, 21.

⁴ Matt. x. 5. xv. 24.

he must consult another Disciple before he can admit them.

Whether they were admitted we know not. But it seems that the desire itself struck the heart of Jesus with a sort of vivid foresight and foretaste of His coming Glory. This eagerness of strangers to visit Him, what was it but an omen of the now not distant day when in a larger sense the *Gentiles should come to His light, and kings to the brightness of His rising*¹? Without returning (so far as the Gospel tells) any direct answer to the application itself, He suffered His thoughts and His words to leap forth across the chasm of the dark shadow, into the bright glorious day of *the joy set before Him*². *The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified*. Human nature might have said, *The hour is come that the Son of Man should be crucified*: but the Divine faith which supported Him overlooked and surmounted all this, and treated the suffering itself as the mere insignificant preface and prelude to the glory.

But He has not forgotten it. The text, which instantly follows, is about *the decease* which He must first *accomplish at Jerusalem*³.

He looked forward to it. We are gathered to look back upon it. Let us imitate, as best we may,

¹ Isai. lx. 3.

² Heb. xii. 3.

³ Luke ix. 31.

His example, in not confining our view to the dreadful spectacle of the bodily anguish, but rather penetrating through all this to the importance and necessity of His death, as He Himself here lays it out before us.

The grain of wheat not yet sown is a bare grain, and nothing more. *It abideth alone.* Look at it, examine it, handle it: can anything be more insignificant? There is in it, as it lies there, not so much as the satisfaction of the hunger of one living thing. But even the insignificance is not the point to which Christ directs attention. It is the solitariness. *It abideth alone.* That grain of wheat is a solitary. While it is as it is, it can never know the blessing of increase, of multiplication, of usefulness, of productiveness. It is just the single grain itself, and it is not, and it will not be, and (except on one supposition) it is physically incapable of becoming, anything else or more.

What is that one condition?

Let it *fall upon the ground and die.* Let it be thrown upon the surface of some field, duly prepared on man's part by plough and harrow, duly prepared on God's part by timely rain and fostering sunshine—there let it lie, till a process analogous to death shall have passed upon it, till it has seemed to decay and

corrupt, till it has swollen and sprouted, and lost shape and form, solidity and cohesion—let a season or two pass over it—leave it to that most ingenious, most sagacious, most powerful of all workers, Nature—which is God's order—herself: and then that bare, lonely, solitary grain will have undergone a change only the more marvellous the more it is looked into: it will have become the parent of an offspring: through death it will have occasioned existence to thirty or sixty or a hundred substances like itself: that one grain may have become the very staff of life to a household. *Except it fall into the ground and die, it must abide alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.*

The connection shows us the real subject of this little Parable—for such it is—this comparison drawn from a natural process, and applied to the illustration of a deep mystery. It sets before us the contrast between what Christ was, what alone He could be, before or without dying, and what He became, what He is, through death.

Except He die, He must abide alone. If He die, He can bear abundant fruit.

That is our subject.

The loneliness of Christ upon earth is a thought often dwelt upon. We touched upon it yesterday.

While in the world, He was in no sense of it. He was a solitary in soul, even in crowded places, with many coming and going, thronging and pressing Him. The great men, the learned men, the professed theologians of Israel, refused Him all sympathy. The poor and suffering heard indeed with gladness His message of joys beyond, and flocked to experience His present power of ministering to their necessities. Yet even these had (for the most part) but faint and unworthy ideas of what He really came to do for them: even these ran after Him, too often, in the hope of His feeding them by miracle¹, or amazing them by some sign from heaven², rather than because they found His Word saving, or His Presence quickening, to their souls. He was alone still, for them.

And even His Disciples, how *slow of heart* were they to understand what He would teach³! How incapable of entering into the deep thoughts which filled and possessed His soul! How resolute to keep their own prejudices, whatever He might say; to represent Him as this and that which He was not and would not be; even to reprove Him for being that which alone would make Him either God's Christ or man's Saviour⁴! He was alone still, even

¹ John vi. 26.

² John iv. 48.

³ Luke xxiv. 25.

⁴ Matt. xvi. 22.

in that inner circle. When at last, on His apprehension, they openly *forsook Him and fled*, they scarcely made the words true, though they threw a cruel light upon them, *Ye shall leave me alone*¹. He *was* alone. He never really had any one save the Father with Him.

But this is not the sense in which we are to read the words before us. It is not exactly of the loneliness of Christ, as commonly understood, that we have to think now. The grain of wheat is as much alone (in Christ's sense) if it be observed lying in the granary amidst a countless heap of other like grains, as if it be separated from all for inspection by the eye or examination by the microscope. We see what is meant by *alone* when we look at its opposite, the bearing fruit. Christ does not count mere coexistence—the outward presence or company of others—as any correction at all of the solitariness of which He speaks. He might have had even the understanding, even the sympathy, of others with Him—as we know that He had the love, the devoted and unselfish love, of a few persons even in those *days of His flesh*—and yet have been *alone* as He here means that word. It is an aloneness, a solitariness, which may be said to be the condition of all men, save in

¹ John xvi. 32.

one relation only : and that one relation is, not the closest of earthly and human relations, but the relation in which the soul, in which the person himself, stands towards Jesus Christ.

We must draw this out a little,

The solitariness of the grain of wheat consists not in having no other grains of wheat around it. It may be one item of an immense heap of like grains. And yet it is alone till it has fallen into the ground and died. Then, then only, can it bear fruit ; then, and then only, is its solitude, its isolation, done with. So is it with Christ.

While He was upon earth, He could have others round Him. He could eat and drink in their houses ; He could converse, He could teach, He could soothe or alarm ; He could convince, exhort, impress, influence. If He had continued thus to the end—if He had lived to the usual limit of human being, and then died *the common death of all men*¹—His name and His words might have been handed down to us in tradition or in Scripture, and we might have been called Christians, just as others are called by the name of some Founder of a Sect or a School, the tenets of which are their opinions, its dogmas their principles. But still, through all this, Christ would

¹ Num. xvi. 29.

have been *alone*. This connection of mere teaching, this respect and reverence for His authority, this taking of His opinion for our opinion, or even of His revelation for our Gospel, leaves Christ Himself a solitary still. He had something of this from His Disciples on earth, and yet He continued alone; alone, for all save His Father. This sort of connection is what man has with man; a connection of intercourse, of respect, of affection, of reverence: and yet, as to the deepest matters of all, man lives by himself: *the heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger*, nay, even a friend, *intermeddles not with its joy*¹. Like the bare grain on its corn-heap, abiding still alone even in its multitude, there is still needed a sowing and a reaping, a death and a resurrection, to change isolation into productiveness. Christ the great Teacher, Christ the mighty Master, Christ the Divine Prophet, is alone still. It is only when He dies—only when He is *lifted up from the earth*, upon the cross of shame and in the death of anguish—it is only then that He *draws all men to Him*²; it is only then that He begins to have a Church and a people and a spiritual offspring; it is only then that He *sees of the travail of His soul*, and is compensated and *satisfied*³.

¹ Prov. xiv. 10.² John xii. 32.³ Isai. liii. 11.

See then how little we really know of Christ while we leave out of sight, or throw into the background, the Cross and the Sacrifice! Till this mystery of mysteries is apprehended, Christ is alone, for us; and we are alone, for Christ. He is to us a separate Person; divided and severed from us, far as the nineteenth century from the first century, far as England from Judæa, yea, far as earth from Heaven. There is no such thing possible, while this is so, as converse, incorporation, communion. We do nothing, while this is so, to prevent His being alone: He can do nothing, while this is so, to prevent us from being solitaires among a multitude. He cannot be more—He is probably far less to us—while this is so, than a Friend whose words we treasure, whose distance we bewail, or whose memory we cherish. At the very most—even if there be the utmost stretch of faith which on this supposition is possible—at the very most He is to us but as one of our human relations, for whom we feel a deep loving regard, but between whom and us there is, of necessity, no actual breaking down of the barriers of a distinct personality, of a separate being. This at the best—O how little likely is it that there will be this!

But now see what the Death does for us—how it ends this *abiding alone*—how it *brings forth fruit* in

souls quickened, and lives transformed, enabled, indwelt, glorified !

For, first, the Death of Christ was a real and true *Propitiation for our sins*¹. We know not how. When we begin to reason about it, we are soon lost and bewildered. When men bid us to explain the Atonement to ourselves thus or thus, they are always adding to Revelation—well if they are not contradicting it likewise ! The great and blessed truth, that our Lord Jesus Christ made in His Death *a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world*, is, above any other, a simple Revelation—a thing which God only could tell, and which we receive and rest upon singly and solely because He tells it. Our Lord Himself, in His great Discourse with Nicodemus, seems to say that the Revelation of the Cross is a greater mystery than the Revelation of the New Birth itself. *If I have told you earthly things*—and the things of which He has told are the birth by water and by the Spirit—*and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?* of those things which no man can know but He who has been in Heaven ? and goes on to speak of the *lifting up of the Son of Man*, that sinners may behold Him in that Death by Crucifixion,

¹ Rom. iii. 25. 1 John ii. 2. iv. 10.

and live¹. Instead of arguing over it, take it as a message from God to your soul. Jesus Christ did, as on this day, bear your sins. You may plead what He suffered on Calvary as your ground of forgiveness and acceptance. Doing so, you will find peace. Failing to do so, you will never know rest: your spiritual life will be to the end *like a troubled sea*; the plunge into eternity will be a leap in the dark, a perhaps and a peradventure where the Christian has his *Yea* and his *Amen*²!

Now when once this revelation of Atonement is grasped by the firm hand of faith, then the saying of the text begins to unfold itself. This brings Christ into quite a new relation. It is no longer some One outside me—a wise Teacher, a benevolent Counsellor, a kind and experienced Friend: all this might be, and yet I might be alone, as to my real secrets, for Him, and He might be alone, like my earthly intimates, for me. But if He has taken my sins upon Him; if He has borne them for me; if He has had such a foresight of love, and such a power of help, and such an infiniteness of self-forgetting self-sacrifice, that He actually, while I was yet a sinner, came down from His glory to be made one with me, and in that oneness then for me to die; if He has done this

¹ John iii. 2—15.

² 2 Cor. i. 20.

centuries ago, and still, now that I am actually struggling through this tangled maze of sinful suffering being for my threescore years and ten, is there above, not so much watching and pitying me, but rather feeling with me, and pleading for me, and bearing me on His heart there in His glory, making His one Sacrifice still availing, still fresh and powerful, as if it were but yesterday or to-day offered ; if all this be so—and what less or else than this is the Scripture doctrine of the Cross?—then, you see, there is a relation between me and my Saviour quite different from anything else that can be dreamed of: He is not alone now, and I am not alone now: He is one with me, and I am one with Him, as I could not be with any earthly person whatsoever. The grain of wheat may be alone while it lies on its heap, or is handled by the curious hand: but now that it has fallen into the ground and died, it is not alone—it has brought forth fruit, much fruit—and I, even I myself, am one little fragment of its produce!

But even this exhausts not the deep saying. *Reconciled by the Death*, we are also *saved by the Life*¹; the life, that is, after death; the life which is out of the death; the life of the Resurrection and the Immortality. *Because I live, ye shall live also*².

¹ Rom. v. 10.

² John xiv. 19.

This too is the *fruit* of the Death.

This could not be while the life was the natural, the human being, of a Man that must die. This could not be while He was preaching and healing, setting us an example, and speaking words such as *never man spake* below. This too waited for the Death. Then, out of it sprang the Life; the life of the Intercession, and the life of the Spirit.

O how have we tried Jesus Christ! How have our sins drawn upon His forbearance! How have our coldnesses, our backslidings, our cherished infirmities, our neglected and half-resisted graces, experimented upon the patience and the prevalence of His Mediation! Reflect, on this solemn evening of His Passion, upon the use that you have made of His Cross and of His Atonement. Think with yourselves what sort of gratitude you have shown for that long-suffering love. O ask yourselves what earthly friend would not long ago have given you up; what earthly friend would not long ago have declared you an ungrateful, a hypocritical, a false man? And then think how over all this ingratitude, inconsistency, and provocation, the grace of Jesus Christ has still triumphed—still repairing, still restoring, still bearing, interceding still!

And thus we pass from the Intercession above to the influence and operation within.

If there be any truth in Holy Scripture, there is a direct communication between the glorified Saviour and His tempted and troubled people below. That communication is carried on by the Holy Spirit, who passes between Christ above and Christians on earth, with perpetual messages of love and consolation and guidance, written not with ink and pen, but on *tables of the heart*¹—assuring them of undying recollection, and conveying into them a resistless strength.

The fulness of these doctrines is for other disclosures; but the germ of them lies all in the mystery of the Cross and Passion. It is the Saviour who has died, not the Man alive before death, who has these things in store for them who believe. The grain of wheat unsown abideth alone: when it has sunk in and died, then it brings forth much fruit.

Wherever there is a soul struggling out of its natural darkness, struggling out of its natural infirmity, struggling out of its natural earthliness, corruption, and sin, towards and at last into the bright light, the supernatural strength, the heavenly elevation and purity, of the new life which is in Christ Jesus—there, there is the fruit of which the

¹ 2 Cor. iii. 3.

text tells. All else may or may not be ; but where this is, there is the loneliness of Christ comforted ; there is the travail of Christ rewarded by its proper harvest. Let no sense of sin, no experience of miserable weakness, no depth of degradation and wretchedness, keep any of us from the feet of Him who for this very purpose came into the world, bore our sorrows and carried our sicknesses, died at last for us, and for us *rose and revived, that He might be Lord, one by one, of the dead and living*¹.

And the fruit spoken of is *much fruit*.

Already much fruit. We will not speak of ambiguous, of indirect, of secondary products of the Death or of the Life ; not now of a Christendom created by Christianity, with all its embellishments of high civilization, and all its blessings of a philanthropy unknown to antiquity : we will go into that deeper and truer world of individual heart and personal motive which underlies and bears up all these : we will say that already—already through the past eighteen ages—already in this busy, restless, self-exalting nineteenth century of ours—Christ has produced, is producing, not fruit only, but much fruit ; that the number of truly redeemed souls praising and blessing and worshipping Christ in all parts of the

¹ Rom. xiv. 9.

earth is no insignificant remnant, but large beyond man's counting, and also multiplying day by day, and to multiply. The fruit of Christ's Death is already, is if it stopped here, not real fruit only, but much fruit. There are those lying this night on beds of pain and anguish, there are those passing this night along the valley of the shadow of death, supported only, and supported sufficiently, by faith in the Death and in the Resurrection of our one Lord—this has been for ages, this is now; long as earth lasts, this shall be—O let no taunt and no scoff of the unbeliever silence our heart's praises when we would speak of what Christ has effected; let us say, and feel it, *This is He that liveth and was dead; and, behold, He is alive for evermore, and has the keys of hell and of death*¹!

And if even this experience of the past and of the present should ever fail to reanimate the faint and wearyhearted Christian as he toils along, sore bested and hungry, by life's dusty and parched highway, towards what he yet believes in as the land of his rest and his inheritance; then let him open the last book of his Bible, and read there what the *much fruit* shall be when the *mystery of God is finished*²—

After this I beheld, and lo, a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds and

¹ Rev. i. 18.

² Rev. x. 7.

people and tongues, stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes and palms in their hands—

These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb—

Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple—

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes¹—

And then let him say to himself, The words are true, after all. The bare grain of the unsown wheat might abide alone; but now that it has died, it has brought forth, it is bringing forth, it shall bring forth, fruit—much fruit!

¹ Rev. vii. 9—17.

GOOD FRIDAY,
March 26, 1869.

WORDS FROM THE CROSS.

I.

LUKE XXIII, 34.

Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do.

THE Seven Words—interrupting, at once, and interpreting, the long silence of the Crucifixion—have been taken for our subject this Lent. If it is a solemn thing to *stand beholding* while Jesus dies, how much more to stand listening—to be admitted into the thoughts which filled, for Him, those dread hours; into the very prayers which occupied His soul in the consummation of the great Sacrifice! Yet this legacy of Divine Love is left to the Church, and it is indolence, even more than reverence, which would keep us back from using it.

To ponder the Seven Words is more certainly safe, more certainly salutary, than to dwell with microscopic curiosity upon the bodily sufferings. Descriptions of the scene may be too graphic. It is

remarkable how brief, how delicate, how reticent are the Evangelists, in setting before us the particulars of the Passion. They seem almost to discourage too near a gazing. They seem to say, *Draw not nigh hither*, if thou comest only to behold the Man. *The place where thou standest is holy*—veil thy face, and listen !

We cannot, indeed, too diligently or too thankfully remember the entireness of the Incarnation and the Incorporation. We must not suffer even the Divinity to overshadow or to eclipse the Humanity. *Made in all things like unto His brethren*, in the infirmities of a human body and the sensibilities of a human soul, thus only could He be our Saviour, our Emmanuel, God with us. If at any time, from any motive, the Church has lost her hold upon the reality of the Manhood, in the same degree she has always become cold and inanimate towards the whole Person and towards the entire Revelation. But this is a totally different thing from that materialistic, and that sensational, view of the Life and of the Cross, which makes compassion rather than faith the end and aim of the contemplation. It would not be difficult to trace the connection between this use of the Cross and some of the chief errors (as we must regard them) of the excessive ritualism, sacramen-

talism, and sacerdotalism, which are threatening at this time with a reactionary movement the life of a reformed and Evangelical Church.

From this particular danger the study of the Words from the Cross is entirely free. The peril which besets us here is equally real, but from an opposite quarter. Superficiality, meagreness, baldness, unspirituality—inability to penetrate into the thing spoken, or to draw from it, for the use of others, the deep truth it enshrines—of this indeed there is risk, and we must throw ourselves upon the promised help of God to make His strength and His wisdom perfect in our foolishness and our weakness.

Of the Seven Words of the Crucifixion, one is recorded by the first two (alone) of the Evangelists, three by St Luke alone, three only by St John. The order in which we propose (on successive Wednesdays) to consider them—allowing for some uncertainty as to the relative place of two of them—will be this. First, the prayer of the text. Secondly, the promise to the dying robber. Thirdly, the parting provision, *Behold thy mother...Behold thy son*. Fourthly, the *Eloi, Eloi*, of the spiritual desertion. Fifthly, the cry of bodily distress, *I thirst*. Sixthly, the great *Τετέλεσται*, *It is finished*. Seventhly, and lastly, the

commendatory prayer at the point of departure,
Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.

After all, how few the utterances—how long the silences—of that awful half-day!

Leaving you to form for yourselves the necessary frame and setting of the prayer which is our subject this evening—the conception, which I cannot trust myself to put into words, of the nailing—just finished, or still proceeding—of the outstretched hands, and (probably) of the feet, to the Cross, lying first on the ground, and then roughly jerked into its socket, with all the first agony of the lacerated muscles and quivering nerves; I must ask you simply to take into your hearts the contrast, the strange, the startling contrast, between the circumstances and the words—

Father, forgive them—for they know not what they do.

When we set this utterance against the impulse of nature, in sharp pain, under wanton cruelty, after such a night of mental agony, after six successive trials, after a Roman scourging (itself often death), after brutal mockery, smiting, and spitting, now to find its end in the slow horrors of a crucifixion, we seem to know of no second secret to explain it by, but just the exclamation of the centurion who

officially watched it, *Certainly this Man was the Son of God.*

We know indeed that there have been men in all ages who have given their lives in testimony to the truth. We do not infer from a martyrdom, however painful or however lingering, more than courage, more than heroism, more than devotion. There were martyrs before Christ, made so by truth and faith, there have been martyrs since Christ, made so by living to Him, by looking stedfastly into heaven after Him and beholding His glory. We do not therefore call them Divine: we only call them patriots, heroes, Christians, saints, as the case may be. Therefore, if we say more of Christ, as we stand by His Cross seeing and hearing, it is because we know something more of Him than the Cross alone tells. We have seen Him, we have heard Him, first in life—we have grown into adoration—we have beheld His glory—have felt what He is in His grace and in His truth, in the wisdom of His words and the power of His works—and then the death is of a piece with it. Then the death sets the seal to the life, and we are conscious that neither courage alone, nor conscience alone, nor heroism alone, nor faith alone, is adequate in explanation. He who thus dies can be believed when He speaks to us; when He says,

what martyrs never said, *I am from above—I came down from heaven—I and my Father are one.* Not least among His testimonies are the Words from the Cross. May they help us, as we listen, in saying to Him from the heart, *My Lord and my God!*

Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do.

Jesus prays. It is something to be capable of prayer, in acute anguish of body. He prays, not for Himself. That is more. A cry for pity, for relief, for mitigation, for death—a cry for patience, for faith, for grace, for heaven—or a cry for mercy in the recollection of sin, then first felt as exceeding sinful—for rescue from an opened hell, from everlasting burnings—this might be. But to forget self altogether in suffering, to think of others, to use that breath of life, each gasp of which is torture, in prayer for another life or another soul—this is not the manner of man, but it is the prayer of Christ. Yet, once again, to think, even then, of some loving and beloved one, some life next our own, and to pray for its welfare and for its salvation—this too might be, might just be. Jesus prays for His enemies, for His murderers, for His crucifiers. He prays, and He inspires the prayer: the first martyr, St Stephen,

prayed it after Him, *Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. Father, forgive them.*

Jesus, on the Cross, is still the Son. His faith fails not, shall not fail as darkness deepens, as powers of darkness wrap Him more closely, more harshly round. *Father, forgive. Then, Father, into Thy hands—.*

Jesus, on the Cross, begins Mediation. Before the life-blood is quite emptied, while yet it trickles only from hands and feet, leaving the heart still undrained, He pleads the virtue of the accomplishing Sacrifice, and, as He spoke last night of His blood *being shed for remission*, so now, in the very act of the outpouring, He prays, in the selfsame word, *Father, remit*; make the sacrifice availing for the sacrificers, the crucifixion for the crucifiers.

Jesus, on the Cross, mediates for His murderers. There is, indeed, a merciful amplitude in the phrase, *Forgive them.* Perhaps the scene interpreted. Perhaps at that moment the quaternion of soldiers were roughly piercing the open palm, the extended foot: no tenderness in the stroke, no concern in the face of any: only doing an every-day duty, in putting one more malefactor to shame and death. At that moment, it may be, fell from His lips the *Father, forgive them*—and the pronoun needed no commentary to tell to whom it pointed.

Brethren! the pronoun shall need no interpreter tonight. Not for the four actual crucifiers alone, shall its wonderful love make intercession. What were they but mechanical instruments of the iron Empire, which then bestrode the beast, that is the world? What were they but tools, only half living, of that real though hidden crucifier, the sin of the world? When Jesus, in the hands of those four rough executioners, prayed, *Father, forgive them*, doubtless He looked through and beyond them to sinners of all time and of every race and speech.

Let us come forth tonight, and claim our part in that prayer, in that intercession. He began then, looking across the dark but narrow chasm of death and the grave, that work of Priesthood and of Mediation which has been His ceaseless employment, the world's one hope, through the more than eighteen centuries which separate this Service from the Sacrifice.

Forgive them : for they know not what they do.

We have a close parallel in St Paul's words to Timothy. Describing himself as having been once *a blasphemer and a persecutor and injurious*, he adds, *but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.*

Inventive love, it has been written, makes ignorance a plea for mercy. These rude executioners, the direct objects of the intercession—might not the Sufferer have arraigned them for that ignorance which was doing despite to God Himself at that moment in the display of every hateful characteristic of the fallen and sinful nature?

Evidently the ignorance is no innocence. Else why the prayer, *Forgive them?* St Paul's ignorance was no innocence, for he speaks of himself, in the same breath, as needing *mercy*—and mercy is, by definition, kindness to the sinful.

There is no such ignorance as takes away sin. These soldiers knew not what they did—knew not (in other words) the Deity of the Sufferer. But they knew—for God never leaves Himself quite without witness—that cruelty, that torture, that a hard heart, is inhuman, is against nature, is wicked—and yet they did it; and because they did it, they sinned; and the ignorance in which they sinned did not make the sin sinless, though it formed, in the sight of infinite justice, a palliation and (in some sense) a plea for the sinner.

We have known hearts on which the word has fallen chillingly. They have said, The sin for which Christ pleads is a sin of ignorance; mine has been

witting and wilful. Very difficult it always must be, to encourage without emboldening; so to apply the Word of God as that it shall neither *make the heart of the righteous sad*, nor yet *strengthen the hands of the wicked*. It is true, that *there is a sin unto death*: Scripture seems to say that evil spirits have sinned it—that they have seen the light of truth and refused it—that they know perfectly who Christ is, and yet have set themselves to His overthrow and His crucifixion. The devil does *know what he doeth*, and therefore for him the Intercessor prays not. And just in so far as the same clearness of insight is in the sinner, so far is the prayer for him fainter and less hopeful. When at last one who has actually *tasted* (as an Apostle writes) *the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come*, departs obstinately and wilfully from the light and life of grace, he too loses—terrible words—the possibility of renewal: he knows what he does, and with eyes wide open walks back into the darkness of an irreversible doom.

But it is the sure characteristic of this last, that he desires not life but death. He who is crying out of the darkness for the hand and for the voice of the Saviour, has not thus sinned. In all sin save this last, this alone desperate one, there is a something of ignorance for the intercession to fasten on. Weak,

frail, irresolute, tied and bound, prone to evil, yet we have not said to it, *Be thou my good*. Though we fall seven times in the day, or seventy times seven, yet the fall is not literally, absolutely, a choice of the darkness. Under deception, momentary at least, we have done wickedly—we have listened to the wrong voice, but we have not actually said to the tempter, *Tempt*, nor to Jesus Christ, *Let me alone*. In that admixture, small though it be, of ignorance at the moment, lies, for us, our hope, our glimmer, of the availing Intercession. Christ shall yet say of us—hasten, captive exile! that he may say it of thee—*Father, forgive him!* he knoweth not what he doeth—his eye is dim, his step tottering, through much sinning—he seeth not the Deity of Him whom he pierceth—he hath not chosen death—Father, give him yet the life!

We have seen, brethren, in all this, the exceeding great Love. The self-forgetfulness of Jesus Christ. His considerateness, stronger than death, yea, prevalent because of death, towards men who *pierce* Him. His unprovokableness by slight or insult. His far-seeing hope for the unthankful and the evil. He looks to the end, the eventual state, the eternity to be lived through. Let Him *see of the travail of*

His soul, in that one case over which alone you have control, your own. It has been written, Wander whither thou wilt, thou must come at last to the place of a skull. Let it be to the Golgotha where Christ gave Himself to be life from the dead. Risk not that inevitable crucifixion *alone*! Hazard not the arrival at that graveyard over the grave of which stands only the inscription, *The wages of Sin is Death*! Seek out that other, and rest not till thou find, which has for its title, *But the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord*! There, crucified between two malefactors, crucified for the sins and the sinners of all time, thou wilt find the Lord of thy life and of thy salvation, and from His lips thou wilt hear two words—two only, and enough for thee—

Father, forgive.

II.

LUKE XXIII. 43.

*Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me
in Paradise.*

TWO persons are here before us ; the most unlike, the most incongruous, the most uncongenial, that the imagination of man could possibly bring together.

The one is a *malefactor*—a criminal, as St Luke calls him—a *robber*, or brigand, is the more specific designation of St Matthew and St Mark—like one of those dangerous characters who infested the Bloody Way from Jerusalem to Jericho, and suggested the features of the Parable of the Good Samaritan ; like the more notable Barabbas, liberated this very morning from the prison where he lay bound for *insurrection and murder*, and now perhaps enjoying, with a hardened offender's satisfaction, that scene of anguish and horror in which he ought to be at this moment himself the prominent sufferer.

St Luke, the Evangelical Evangelist, the friend and spiritual brother of St Paul, is not afraid to present to us this malefactor in all the plainness and in all the repulsiveness of his former bad life ; and, in so doing, he reproves that timidity and cowardice of a human theology, which would guard against possibilities of offence and misconstruction by taking out of Divine grace itself all that ought to make it magnificent and marvellous in our eyes. There are interpreters and commentators in abundance, who can give you a thousand amiable traits, a thousand hopeful antecedents, in this dying robber ; a thousand proofs that he was not what we take him for—was already half a disciple—needed but one added opportunity to make him a Christian and an Israelite indeed. St Luke had no such apprehensions. He knew, taught of God, that there is no morality like that of an unconditioned mercy, an all-sufficient Saviour, and a God *that justifieth the ungodly*.

Was it not wisely ordered, though in the counsels of a wisdom far above man's, that that lowest depth of Divine self-abasement should have towering over it one highest height of Divine self-manifestation—that that day of blackest darkness should be lighted up by one absolutely unexampled gleam of radiance, and that the first example of the efficacy

of the Cross of Jesus Christ should be such as to kindle into letters of fire the special promise of the Crucifixion grace, *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me?*

If we take quite literally the words of two earlier Evangelists, we must suppose that even this malefactor had joined, at first, in the reproaches (if not in the blasphemies) of his comrade, so far, at least, as to challenge the descent of Christ from the Cross as the proof of His Messiahship and His Sonship. And who shall limit, by moments or hours, the freedom of the action of grace? Who shall take the *where it listeth* out of the Divine similitude of *the wind that bloweth*, and, even so, of *the Spirit that breatheth*? There may be fanaticism, there may be Antinomianism, in our application, to ourselves or to others, of the inspired record: not on that account must we erase or blur the record, instead of trusting the Hand which wrote it to guard, to authenticate, and to bless.

God knew the ingenuity of the self-tormentor in excluding himself from the consolations of grace. God knew how each word and each letter of the most cheering promise, of the most glorious revelation, can be twisted into a shape menacing rather than comforting to the soul bent upon self-despair. Therefore He would so write His Word, especially

in its personal memoirs, as to make it inexcusable, for all time, to doubt or to circumscribe the munificence of His forgiveness.

The robber—the habitual, the notorious, the at last captured, sentenced, crucified robber—he hangs still on his cross, by the wayside of time, as the great monument of the possibilities of grace: and we at least, who know what we are, and what alone will suffice for our encouragement, in the work whether of inward hope or of outward effort, shall bless God for ever that He has not added one particular to dim the lustre, or to abridge the compass, of that sudden, that indeed miraculous, conversion; has not suffered one single expression to fall from His Evangelist, implying either a peculiar want of previous opportunity, or else a real previous preparation of heart, for the reception of truth; has not said either that this man had been absolutely destitute of education, of good influence, of casual meetings with Christ; or that, on the other hand, in intervals of sinning, or in moments of remorse, or in the hardships of a prison, there had visited him already some influences of a better life, softening, melting, predisposing him for Christ; but has left the simple student to imagine rather an instantaneous conviction, as well as a supernatural transformation.

The transformation itself, how wonderful ! Study the features of the new character : what characteristic of Divine grace is lacking ?

Remember, as you stand beholding, the condition of that racked and agonized frame ; how far more probable, how far more natural, in that misery, cursing than blessing—ebullitions of rage, of despair, of hatred, of blasphemy, than any gentler breathings of sorrow or pity, of prayer or repentance.

Sounds of mockery and insult are in his ears—even priests and elders forgetting their high rank, their spiritual dignity, in heaping scorn and reproach upon their slowly dying Victim. His own associate, in the crimes of a life and the horrors of an execution, catches their tone and repeats their blasphemy. They say, *Let Him save Himself if He be Christ.* He echoes the word—*If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us.* One voice alone, in all that tumult, sounds in mitigation, sounds in defence : it is the voice of the other malefactor, answering and rebuking his fellow.

And that voice speaks, first, in reverence. The very community of suffering ought to inspire respect. To be *in the same condemnation* makes it an impiety, as well as an inhumanity, to revile. In the face of one God, in the endurance of one sentence, in the

prospect of one judgment, reverence alone ought to stop the mouth which would insult the dying Man beside thee. When the Avenger is abroad—when sin has found thee out—when, if this Man were a sinner, He were but thine equal—is this a time for disdain, for contumely, for outrage? *Thyself in the same condemnation, dost not thou* (to say nothing of human compassion) so much as *fear God*? To revile a fellow-sufferer—most of all, if the suffering be a punishment, and the punishment unto death—is to defy with the last breath the common Creator, the Judge of both.

Great grace is in the words. Deep thought, tender feeling, profound truth. But listen again.

The voice speaks on. And now in penitence. Who would not have looked rather for excuse and self-exculpation? Who could be expected to think crucifixion his due—that agonizing, that inhuman, that barbarous death? Who would not say, *This* death passes my desert—no sin, no crime, could merit this? The man who can say from the cross, *And we indeed justly*, has certainly received of God the grace of true repentance.

But listen once more. Hear the absolution of Jesus in the same breath with his own condemnation. From the cross, as before in the judgment-hall, is

heard the sentence of acquittal. Pilate said, *I find no fault in this man*: the sinner crucified beside Him says, *This man hath done nothing amiss*.

But even these three utterances are but preliminary. There be many that say, *Certainly this was a righteous man*: but they stop there. The dying malefactor must turn acknowledgment into prayer, or he has done nothing. In the hearing of blasphemers and murderers, he utters aloud the voice of faith and of supplication—has any prayer, through all these centuries, quite equalled it when we take account of the circumstances?—*Lord, remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom*.

Then this Man is a King. He dies—yet He is a King. He is numbered with these transgressors—He dies the death of the most wicked—He is called by no man Martyr or Victim—no hand, no voice, is raised in behalf of Him—His own nation despises, rejects, disowns Him—yet He is a King.

And a King not of this world. He shall die ere He reigns. The *coming* looked for is future; no descent from the Cross, but an Advent from heaven. Marvellous grace, thus to understand in a moment what neither Rabbis, nor even disciples, have yet apprehended! O stern yet gracious discipline of that cruel deathbed! lesson not learnt on bed of

down, yet caught as by intuition on that uplifted cross!

Lord, remember me when Thou comest. I pray not, *Save Thyself and me*: that were no salvation such as my heart now yearns for: that were but to return for a few short years to a blood-stained sin-stained earth, again to sin, again to die. *Remember me when Thou comest*—the Cross borne, death confronted, the grave opened, the mystery accomplished, the victory won.

Remember me. One thought, one recollection, that shall suffice me. No place of honour or glory, no right-hand or left-hand throne: only this—

Just as I am—

just as Thou art—

remember me!

It is not for us to articulate in words, or even to breathe into thoughts, the effect of this prayer upon the soul of the dying Master. Surely it was to Him more than the attendance of twelve legions of Angels, thus to see, already, as though by anticipation, the fruit of His soul's travail. Silent to taunts and insults, silent amidst the hurricane of blasphemies, He is not silent, no, not on the Cross, to the sinner's prayer. He answers, He fulfils, He more than fulfils it: the prayer was for remembrance, the answer is companion-

ship; the prayer spoke of a far future, the answer is for the present, is for *today*.

Was there any disciple within hearing—yes, there was one—to catch that characteristic, that dear *Verily* of the dying Master? How must he have felt the continuity, the unity, of the life and of the death, and drawn encouragement for the swiftly approaching night when the audible speech and the visible presence should be his no more!

Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise.

There was something of prophecy even in the *today*. For crucifixion ended not, commonly, with the twelve hours, or the twenty-four: it was protracted, often, in its horror and in its anguish, till the second day, the third, the fourth. There was a sound of mercy in the very *today*, promising a speedier end to those sufferings; and *the breaking of the legs*, recorded by the beloved disciple, fulfilled it.

In Paradise. That name of rest and felicity, appropriated in the Greek Bible to the original home of man's innocence, is thus transferred by our Lord Himself to a state or a region immediately beyond death, into which He Himself would enter that very day; so soon, therefore, as the warfare was accomplished and the burden of the flesh laid aside. The

today so powerfully emphasized leaves no doubt whatever upon this interpretation. *Paradise*, elsewhere, may be a name for *heaven*. It is so, probably, in the two other places of its occurrence in Scripture. St Paul was *caught up into Paradise*, and that Paradise was *the third heaven*. *To him that overcometh*, it is promised in the message to the Church of Ephesus, *will I give to eat of the tree of life*, and that tree of life grows *in the Paradise of God*. Like other figures of Holy Scripture, *Paradise* is capable of more than one application: here to the intermediate, there to the final, home of the blessed dead: here to that presence of Christ which is instant upon dissolution, of which St Paul says that he *has a desire to depart and to be with Christ*; elsewhere to that presence of Christ which waits for resurrection, for the glorious adoption and manifestation of the sons of God.

Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise. Wheresoever the Christian soul is while the body sleeps in dust, thither journeyed the Lord, brightening our Hades, as He also consecrated the grave. Whatsoever be the unseen home for us, between death and glory, such was it for Him. This is that descent of Christ into Hades which we commemorate day by day in the Apostles' Creed—the Hades of the Blessed, not the Hell of the lost. One mysterious passage of Holy

Scripture seems to tell us that in that intermediate state the Spirit of Christ was not inactive; that the putting to death of the body was the quickening of the soul, and that on some errand of love and power He journeyed in that interval, carrying hope and salvation to some inmates of a less than perfect world.

All these disclosures run up, on all sides, into mystery, and we do best to veil our faces as we reverently desire to look into them.

But the second of the Seven Words lifts one corner of this dividing veil, and tells of a *today* which is the day of the death, and which, so far from being a day of distress, darkness, or desolateness, is a day of immediate companionship and of unclouded vision. *Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise.*

It is a word of blessed hope for such as are mourning the faithful dead; for such, also, as feel that natural, that inevitable, human shrinking from a journey in the dark into an undiscovered country and an unrealized world. Christ is there in a sense in which He is not here: there are they, and there shalt thou be in thy season, with Him in Paradise.

We have viewed tonight—it is the only night which compels the contemplation—not the One Cross,

but the three crosses. St Paul says of himself, *I have been crucified with Christ*—comparing himself to one of the two criminals who hung beside the dying Master on Calvary. It is scarcely in type and figure that that scene is still realized. The Crucified Lord still occupies a middle Cross between two others. We, dying people all of us, with many a nail driven already into hands and feet, in preparation for the last end, hang beside Him, on the right and on the left, and the one difference between the half of us and the other half, lies in the state of our hearts towards the central Figure, towards the dying Lord of Life. No maledictions are now audible, in Christian lands certainly, upon Him whom all profess to honour. Yet, in secret hearts, there is, even now, much of that impatience, much of that irritation, which vented itself on Calvary in the ejaculations of the impenitent robber. *If Thou be Christ, save Thyself and us.* Why this wearisome, this unreasonable prolongation of the strife and of the struggle? Why this circuitous, this ambiguous progress towards the rest and the glory? Why not a direct course, a flowery path, and a swift salvation? Why—on other lips—why this strictness of rule and this severity of discipline? Why not a little repose, a little indulgence, a little, a very little, sinning?

May ours be the other cross—not bitterer, not more painful, not half so lonely, so cheerless, so isolated—from which the only sound heard is that of serious self-confession, of earnest repentance, of deep faith, of absolute trust! *Lord, remember me!* Remember not my sins, my misdeeds, my backslidings—remember only Thy mercies, and let them hide, let them envelope me! When Thou comest—in Thy kingdom—then, then, Lord, remember me!

III.

JOHN XIX. 26, 27.

Behold thy son.....Behold thy mother.

THE selfishness of suffering is proverbial. Where is selfishness in the Divine Passion? The Seven Words themselves answer, It is excluded. The thoughts of the Saviour, bound and dying, are at large still, and they embrace Humanity itself in their compass. In that first and sharpest sting of anguish, He prays for his executioners; for that most degraded, most brutal humanity, which has no compassion and no compunction in it. The second Word from the Cross is for that humanity which sin has found out, and which has begun to bewail and to abhor itself for its transgressions. For the first He is the Intercessor, praying for pardon. For the second He is the King, bestowing His Paradise. From that outermost circle of all, through that intermediate, the soul wings its flight homeward, rests on its own, rests on the Mother.

There we are to fix our gaze tonight—not having reached, thus far, one mention, one recollection, of Self. And when that remembrance at **last** comes, yet of what self, and what **recollection**? A self *made sin* for others, and a recollection which is all of God.

The third Word has been called the testament, the last will, of Jesus Christ. In it He is our Example. He has been so from the beginning of life, He shall be so to the end. He is teaching us to die. He is guiding human life to an orderly, a thoughtful, a dutiful close. He bids us to provide for the necessities, for the comforts, for the sorrows, of those that survive. We are not, even in the anticipation of Paradise, to shut the door behind us upon earth's tears and earth's affections.

It is only St John who has preserved for the Church this deeply touching record. The other Evangelists name not, in this last scene, the Lord's Mother. They speak only of *the women who had followed Him from Galilee*—and they *stand afar off, beholding*. It would seem as though there were a guarded, an almost studied reticence, all through the Gospels, concerning her who might so easily attract too much of the Church's notice. In this reticence we read the inspired protest, beforehand, against the

exaggerations, the superstitions, at last the idolatries, of days that were to come.

But St John has it in his commission to preserve to us one trait of the dying Master, which involves the mention of her presence. We should have lacked, but for St John, the full understanding of the early prophecy of Simeon, *Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also.* We should not have known, for certain, that the mother was an eye-witness of the Crucifixion; standing so near the Cross that she was within reach of the audible Voice—within sight therefore of the loved Face and Form upon which Death was slowly maturing his cruel and terrible work.

It seems as though the little group of mourners, standing at first afar off, had gradually crept nearer to the Cross itself, unable to resist that attraction, half awe, half love, by which, in all ages, the Saviour lifted up from the earth would draw all men unto Him. We must not mar the simplicity of God's picture by any touch of human embellishment. Enough for us to stand beholding, not in word but in thought, that central Cross, that wounded and agonized body, that countenance of long-suffering anguish, that figure and face of the Mother below—and then, checking the utterance of a merely human emotion—knowing that we honour Him best when we learn of Him

—to fix our whole attention upon the two brief sentences which break the silence. *When Jesus saw His mother, and the disciple standing by, whom He loved, He saith unto His mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith He to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.*

It seems probable, judging from the words, that the Mother was already a widow. Probable too, judging from the words, that she was childless but for Jesus. The *brethren* of whom we read in the Gospels, may have been half-brothers, or even cousins, of our Lord: the question is one which has been keenly debated, in two and in three directions, and it must remain now for ever uncertain: but we must think that the record before us is strongly against the opinion that the mother of our Lord had sons of her own, whose natural right and duty was set aside by the appointment of one outside the family to be her protector and companion in the future. St John, indeed, says, in the 7th chapter, that His brethren themselves did not at that time believe: but even this unbelief, while it lasted, would scarcely deprive them of the common privileges of sonship, and within a few days from this time they were to become con-

vinced and converted disciples, of which the Omniscience of Christ Himself had already (of course) the clear foresight.

Making full allowance, then, for unknown possibilities of incongruity and uncongeniality of spirit, which might account for the substitution, in their place, of a stranger, we must think it more natural, more consistent with the revealed mind of Jesus Christ to suppose here, not widowhood only, but childlessness; to look upon St John's home as a needed shelter, upon St John's devotion as a needed companionship.

Has it, now, jarred upon any ear, the title by which Jesus from the Cross, as once in Cana of Galilee, addresses His Mother—*Woman, behold thy son?* It could not do so, if you were familiar with Classical writings, in which the very same term is applied to princesses and sovereigns. It is a noble illustration of the dignity of mere humanity, of the intrinsic superiority of man and woman to any of the conventional trappings in which title or rank can envelope them. *Woman* is "lady," "mistress," "sovereign"—"mother" or "sister" or "wife"—according to the context and circumstances in which it is found. We shall count it unnecessary to seek any deeper

reason for the choice of the appellation here. Some have seen in it the final adieu of our Lord to all special human relationships, just as, in its earlier application at Cana of Galilee, they read a designed rebuke and correction of any human intrusion into the exercise of His Divine Ministry. In both places we would rather listen for that sound of nature and of reality which is prior to all titles and to all appropriations; which carries us back to God's creation and to God's institution, before the stamp of the world has yet impressed itself upon either.

Behold thy son! The words were decisive as to the coming end. It may be, that some human hope may have lingered still in that heart, as to a bodily descent from the Cross to reverse the humiliation and to assert the glory. But now the word is spoken, Thy Son leaves thee—leaves thee, as such, for ever—receive in His place the friend and the disciple. Great honour for St John—he is to be instead of Jesus Christ to His mother.

An erring Communion, driven to support Mariolatry from the Gospels, has forced upon this scene a meaning most alien to it. St John is the representative of the Church, and St John is committed to the protectorship of the Virgin. Just so, in earlier

times, the firm yet loving correction, *What have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come*—has been forced by the Romanist into the directly opposite meaning, The hour of thy ascendancy in my kingdom is not to come till I have left the earth—then thy mediation shall be acceptable and all-availing. Who can argue with distortions, with inventions, like these?

From that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

It might seem as though the compassionate Son would withdraw her from the sight of the agonies still to be borne—as though St John led her away, on the instant, from the scene of anguish to the retirement of his own lodging in Jerusalem. We know not, quite for certain, how literally to interpret *that hour*. St John himself was witness, he tells us, of the piercing of the side—either he went and returned; or else the *hour* must be largely read, as including the whole remainder of the Passion. In all these things men interpret differently, and we cannot judge between them. There is something exquisitely tender, and therefore beautifully Christ-like, in the thought of His anxiety to spare her the *Eloi*, and the *thirst*, and the last cry, and then the rude piercing: and that which is thus beautiful in Him is not

without its counterpart in her—that she should have borne so much and yet also should have submitted so humbly to His will that she should witness no more—that, as some one has written, she had both the faith to stand by the Cross, and also the obedience to depart before the dissolution. He bids her go—He would die alone with God.

Behold thy mother . . . Behold thy son.

(1) Jesus, on the Cross, cares for His own. In His agony, with the sins of a world laid upon Him—not to speak of the body bruised and wounded for our iniquity—He thinks of, He provides for, He feels with, His mother. Behold in this the recognition and ratification of earthly relationships. He would have us care for our own. He would have us, in life and in death, be sons, be brothers, be parents, not though but because we are Christians too. How many have made religion an excuse for undutifulness! How many have represented it to themselves as a Christian duty to forget, to disparage, to renounce their home! Christ did not so. In death, as in life, He would have us support and comfort and cling to those whom He, in nature, has made *bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh*.

(2) Jesus, on the Cross, founds a new family.

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Gives to His mother a spiritual son, gives to His friend a spiritual mother. Establishes a new sort of kindred—made so under, and in sight of, and because of, His Cross: in virtue of His Death and Passion gathering together anew all things in Himself. And thus He has, first of all, made kindred twice kin, where souls are separately believing, separately devoted; and, secondly, given a substitute for family—where there is no home, or no such bond of union at home—in the Church, in the congregation, in the several homes and hearts, which He has purchased with His own blood. What was it which really made this man and this woman son and mother? What but the common love of Jesus? What but the fact that they had stood together under the Cross, and seen Him in His agony, who was the Light and the Life of each? No one on earth—no one, certainly, in Christendom—needs to be lonely. If there is no home, there is the Church.

(3) Jesus, on the Cross, provides for His own through His own. Taken away from the earth, as to His personal presence, He says to one, Behold thy mother—and He says to another, Behold thy son. It is true, He was Himself, to each and to both, the Light and the Life. To St John we know what He was, from the Gospel, the Epistles, and the Revelation.

To His mother we infer what He was, after His Ascension, when we find her enrolled among the disciples, enjoying the Apostolic ministry, breaking the holy bread, and partaking in the communion and in the prayers of the spiritual body. Yet even Christ Himself, spiritually known and trusted and communed with, does not supersede the mutual offices of His disciples, but, on the contrary, exercises through them many of His own personal offices of grace and consolation. He said not to His mother, He said not to St John, *I go, yet I come—I go, but, lo, I am with you alway—therefore live alone, each one, your short lifetime, and then depart and rejoin me.* This was true, but it was not the whole truth. Man does need present sympathy, visible companionship. The absence of Christ, and especially to those who had seen Him thus taken, was an affliction, a life-long loss: over and above the spiritual compensation, He would give them also a human; and it lay in the ministrations, offered and accepted, of men and of women seeing Christ in each other, and reckoning as done to Him, and received from Him, that which love, for His sake, can do to brighten earth's homes and to re-consecrate to His service earth's relationships.

(4) Jesus, on the Cross, draws us to Him—from

the Cross comes down to us—through the Cross draws us together. Where is that force, in nature or life, which can be compared to this, the Magnet of the Crucifixion? Are we in sorrow? here is our consolation—sin is borne, and heaven is opened. Are we in prosperity? Here is that which at once sobers mirth and makes happiness thankfulness. Are we tied and bound by a sin? Look unto Him—hear it said, *Drink this in remembrance that Christ's blood was shed for thee*—rise and renew the fight, and *in this sign conquer*. So it is in all things. Well may the Cross be worn now as the ornament upon the neck of the bride, and as the heavenward-pointing finger of our Architecture. From that Cross He stoops to us—entering into our daily trials—sharing our bereavements, reconciling us to disappointment, loss, and obscurity—while He speaks of that wealth which He laid aside for poverty, of that *equality of essence with God* which He thought it no ambition to retain while we lay in ruin. Under that Cross He knits us one to another—saying to one, *Behold thy son*; to another, *Behold thy mother*—giving to each one his new work and his new relationship, and bidding each exercise each in the shadow of His Cross and in the light of His glory. In the face of that Cross what is human slight, human affront, human wrong? Who shall

resent his own little injuries, in the presence of One who, though He was God, yet was buffeted and scourged and spit upon—at last nailed to the Cross by wicked men, and hanged in the sight of His own earth and sun a spectacle to the universe of Angels and men?

Hasten, Christian! to see thy charge and thy blessing—thy place in Christ's family, thy home in Christ's presence and glory!

IV.

MATTHEW XXVII. 46.

My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?

THE fourth Word—the central Word of the seven—is before us tonight. We have read the first Word, *Father, forgive them*—the prayer for pardon uttered for the executioners, as they cruelly pierced the hands and the feet, and lifted the sacred burden upon the accursed tree. We have read the second Word, *To-day shalt thou be with me*—the promise which opened Paradise to the repentant robber. We have read the third Word, *Thy son...Thy mother*—the adoption which was to cheer the desolate home and make the friend the representative of the Son. Each one of these was a new sign, a new manifestation, of the Only-begotten—in His Humanity and in His Divinity, in His self-forgetfulness and in His love.

Yet there seemed to be something still lacking, to distinguish this Death absolutely from any other ;

something, by which we might know that this Man was no mere victim of popular rage or priestly hatred or imperial tyranny, no mere martyr dying for truth, hero for country, or saint for God. Others, in His strength at least, have blessed and prayed for their murderers ; others have ministered in dying moments to conscience-stricken fellow-sufferers ; others have spent their last breath in a tender soul-stirred adieu to loving friend or destitute mother. It is memorable, surely, that no one of these three Divine sayings has stamped itself upon the record of the two earliest Evangelists. No one of these three—and no one of the last three, still to be unfolded. Only this one, this single one—our Word for this evening—as though it contained *the* lesson, *the* doctrine, *the* revelation, of the Cross and Passion and precious Death—*About the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?*

This is that most awful portion of the dread six hours, from the sight of which we thought it probable that the tender thoughtfulness of the Sufferer sought to withdraw His mother. *From that hour*—we were inclined to read it literally—*that disciple took her unto his own home.*

For indeed it is impossible for created lips to

describe, for human thought to conceive, the mysterious, the preternatural horrors of those three hours of which the text marks the close.

It seems as though it were impossible for that crime of crimes to be consummated without some visible sign of the observation and of the displeasure of God. If there is one line of truth in the representation made in Scripture concerning Jesus Christ, who He is, and what, this condemnation of the Just One, this judging of the Judge, this casting out from His own earth, this killing the Prince of Life, in one word, this bold *shutting out of love* in the Person of the Well-beloved, should not—almost could not—be perpetrated without some remonstrance, some expostulation, of Nature herself against it. Thus, in one aspect, we interpret that sudden darkness, that noonday night.

Was it not also a last call to the conscience of the city and people? There is no one of God's signs more bewildering, more confounding, than His ordinance of darkness—when it takes the exceptional form of irregularity, of unexpectedness, of surprise. Picture to yourselves, if it be possible—as some one has written—"the impression of this darkness on Calvary and throughout Jerusalem; the individual details of terror and apprehension, the stings of conscience, the interrupted lusts, the disturbed midday meals, the de-

rangement of the temple-service, the confusion as to the evening sacrifice, &c. The Divine sign cried then, as it cries ever, Be silent, and think !”

But, thirdly, and above all, that three-hours’ darkness was the fitting veil of secresy for that mysterious wrestling not with flesh and blood, of which this exceeding bitter cry is to us the faint, and the only, interpretation, *My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?* It was not for mortal eye so much as to scan the countenance—much less is it for human imagination to penetrate the experience—of the Son of God thus speaking, thus expostulating with the Father in heaven. Well had it been for the Church’s truth, and for the Church’s peace, had the darkness which hid the climax of the Sin-bearing been made prohibitory of speculation, hortatory rather to silence, concerning it.

From the sixth hour, the midday hour of extreme heat and brilliance, there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour, the hour of mid-afternoon, Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?

The Evangelists are careful to mark that the hours of darkness were hours of silence: not till their close,

or near their close—which was the close also of the life—was that long silence broken by the one cry which told all that might be told of its employment and of its signification.

As in the great opening conflict of His ministerial life, the Temptation in the Wilderness, so now at its end, the Book of Inspiration furnished the very language in which the thoughts of the Man of Sorrows expressed themselves.

✓ Some holy man of old, moved by the Holy Ghost, poured forth in the 22nd Psalm the woes of a sorely troubled and persecuted life. Doubtless each verse of that Psalm had a meaning even for him. But when you study its details of distress and suffering, you feel that to no human being, in any period of the world's history, could they be fully or exactly appropriate. Only in Jesus Christ, lifted up on the Cross, did words such as these find any fulfilment, *All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out their lips, and shake their heads, saying, He trusted in God, that He would deliver Him: let Him deliver Him, if He will have Him...They pierced my hands and my feet...they stand staring and looking upon me. They part my garments among them: and cast lots upon my vesture.* Not less marvellous are the closing verses of that Psalm, in which, after the *bringing into the dust of death*, there

follows that strain of prophetic exultation, *Thou hast heard me from among the horns of the unicorns...I will declare Thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee...My seed shall serve Him: they shall be counted unto the Lord for a generation. They shall come, and the heavens shall declare His righteousness: unto a people that shall be born, whom the Lord hath made.*

It is a mere imagination, though it has found acceptance with many, that our Saviour on the Cross uttered the whole of this Psalm, and made His own, by special application, each particular of the wonderful Prophecy. But, although this is one of those formal and mechanical treatments of Scripture, which destroy the very life which they would embellish, it is impossible to enter with intelligence into the cry which breathed itself in the opening words of the Psalm, without remembering the marvellous sequel from which those first words are detached.

The Evangelists have loved to recall the actual sound, the original language, in which the cry uttered itself—partly, no doubt, to make intelligible the strange perversion which made the cry a call for Elias—but no less, surely, from the desire to preserve here, as in the *Ephphatha* and the *Abba* of earlier utterances, the precise phrase and form in which the lips so soon to

be silent had framed the solemn, the memorable lamentation.

My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?

We cannot think, with many, that with the utterance of this cry the darkness of nature and the darkness of the spirit were instantly exchanged for light and glory. Rather do we believe that both alike lay heavily upon the scene—the inward scene, and the outward—until the actual giving up of the ghost. So we read—and so, we think, God would teach us.

We must humbly ponder now the cry itself—and, in doing this, we must ask for a spirit of reverence and of supplication.

For doubtless there was that passing in the soul of the Sufferer, during those long hours of darkness, of which it may well be said to us, *Draw not nigh hither—put off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place where thou standest is holy ground.*

But O! brethren, how utterly do they misread the Crucifixion, how deeply do they dishonour the very Manhood of the Crucified, who imagine the anguish breathed in the *Eloi* to be explicable by the pain of dying or by the fear of death! Was Jesus our Lord less brave than hundreds and thousands of His own followers, who have met death with an undaunted

courage, when it came to them, for the testimony of truth, in the most horrible shape, with every ingenuity and with every protraction of torture? Was He, who had uttered those Divine words yesternight, written in the 14th and three following chapters of St John—words which absolutely overlooked and annihilated the intervening Passion in the clear foresight of the joy and the glory that should follow—was He, when the foreseen and foretold death came to Him, overawed and terrified by it to the utter extinction within Him of all resolution and of all courage? Did He cry out that God had forsaken Him, because that which He came to suffer was now being accomplished in Him?

This is the alternative presented in the fourth Word from the Cross. Either a faintheartedness beneath the human—or, a mystery of sin-bearing unfathomable and Divine.

This was that cup for the passing of which from Him, *if it were possible*, He prayed last night in Gethsemane—to the drinking of which, if *the Will* required it, He had there solemnly devoted Himself. Not the cup of death—victim's, hero's, martyr's—with all the shame and all the anguish with which the death of the Cross could embitter it. Not the cup of death: something else, something distinct and different from that;

something, into which *Angels may desire to look*, yet behold not; something, in which lay the ransom and the propitiation—the fact revealed, the method hidden; so awful, that the Divine Son trembled and quailed under it; so necessary, that the Divine Father, whose love was His from everlasting, must with unsparing unflinching Hand enforce, inflict, exact it. “From God Himself He suffers something ineffable to us.”

But let us not fall into that fearful distortion of a theology falsely so called, which would represent our dying Master as having, either on the Cross, or after dissolution, literally suffered the pains of hell. Dream not of a Divine wrath venting itself upon the beloved Son. Doubt not that God looked down with tenderest compassion, with most perfect love, upon that suffering form, upon that agonized Soul. Whatever the sin-bearing was, it was not this. It was not the indignation, not the anger, not the fury, not the hatred, of the holy and blessed Father from whom He came, with whom He was one. There was a forsaking—He says so; but it was not this: there was a *being made sin*—He has said so by His Apostle: there was an incorporation, a binding up, with the sinner in his sin: yet He who endured it all for us was able, in the very midst of it, to look up to Heaven; was able, in the midst of it, to cry to the Father who saw it needful,

My God, My God! Hell is not, where there is still
My God!

Yet, even as we speak—and speak, we trust, none but earnest, reverent, watchful words—we feel ourselves half reproved by that monitory darkness: we would rather pray, without more words, the ancient prayer of the Church, so brief, so full, so true—

By Thine Agony and bloody Sweat, by Thy Cross and Passion—whatsoever it was—yea, by Thy precious Death and Burial; Good Lord, deliver us.

Why hast Thou forsaken me? May we dare to answer that desolate cry? May we presume to take up the question, and say—

Lord, it was *for us men, and for our salvation.*

First, that we might learn what sin is: how deadly, to cause thy suffering; how hateful in the sight of God, that Thou shouldest feel Thyself forsaken of Him for so much as coming nigh to it, even to bear and to destroy it.

Secondly, that we might know how entirely Thou didst take it and carry it—yea, for an Apostle has said it, didst even *become sin*—that we might feel it gone, and, in our new freedom, might even, as the same holy Apostle has said; *become righteousness in Thee.*

✓ Thirdly, that we might distinguish between the feeling and the reality of God's desertion; that we might learn, in Thee, to trust Him even when we cannot see, even when we are out of the sunshine of His smile, in the shadow of that spiritual solitude which is darker, yea darker far, than the valley of death itself.

And so, finally, that we might be made willing, if need be, even to die thus; even to be made like Thee in Thy uttermost desolation, when, with the sins of a world upon Thee, and with tenfold need of the brightest ray from heaven to make the load endurable, Thou wast called to taste death itself in darkness—teaching us that it is not comfort but safety, not the consciousness but the reality of God's love, which is indispensable; that, as there is of course no merit, so neither is there always any advantage, in that confidence of acceptance, in that serenity of hope, in that broad daylight of assurance, which some make the essence of faith, or the whole of religion.

Make us willing, Lord, like Thee, to cry oftentimes, *Why am I forsaken?* yet always, in the doing so, to say, nevertheless, *My God, My God!* Thus, treading in the footsteps of Thy humiliation, may we go from strength to strength, being gradually perfected in weakness—and at last *be with Thee where Thou art, beholding Thy glory!*

V.

JOHN XIX. 28.

I thirst.

THE fifth Word is the briefest of all, and (in one sense) the most human.

Some of the seven Sayings are high above us, breathing a spirit of such absolute self-forgetfulness as only One could rise to. And some of them are peculiar to the Redeemer—to Him who came to bear our sins and to make reconciliation for iniquity. One of them is a Royal saying—such as none could utter but He who holds the very keys of hell and death. *Verily I say unto thee*—and we have not forgotten who was addressed—*Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise.*

The fifth Saying is, at first sight, altogether human. *I thirst.* We shall not say one word to make it less human. We would have it brought very near to us all. We would read in it a proof of the

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perfect Humanity, of the entire incorporation with the weakest and the most abject, of Him who is called in the Word of Truth *Emmanuel, which, being interpreted, is, God with us.*

Yet, while so regarding and so applying it, we shall find it also a Word full of dignity, full of instruction, full of mystery, full of Deity.

It is strange to see how instantly we quit the path of certainty, when we turn from the blessed page itself to any commentary or any interpreter. The experience of hesitation and contradiction thus gained ought to send us back with double thankfulness to the written letter, in which *wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err* materially.

What an attraction has been, is, and shall be, in Jesus Christ *lifted up from the earth!* As He said, so have we seen it. He does *draw all men unto Him.* The prevalence, in our day, of unbelief, of scepticism, of Atheism itself, has not neutralized the Magnet of the Cross—has not produced any universal, no, nor any wide-spread indifference, to the simple, ungarnished story, written in the Gospels, of the Life and Death of Jesus of Nazareth. No literature is so popular as that which treats of Him. There must be something, lying very deep in man's heart and man's nature, which

testifies to the want at least of just such a Person. Every smallest, most minute, most trifling question about Him is found interesting. Here, for example, in this little incident of the Crucifixion, in these two short verses of the 4th Gospel which alone record it, you would be surprised at the number and the eagerness of the controversialists who have disputed the interpretation. It shows the interest felt in *Jesus Christ and Him crucified*. And there is just the fact itself, as God has caused it to be written, unquestioned and unquestionable amidst all contrarieties of opinion on its surroundings and its circumstances.

After this, St John writes—after the committal of the mother to the disciple—after her removal, as we have thought possible, from the scene of anguish—after one thing, also, unrecorded by St John, and apparently intervening here, the cry, *My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?*—*After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.*

How are we to read the clause, *that the Scripture might be fulfilled?* with what precedes, or with what follows it? with *accomplished*, or with *saith*? Does it mean, that all things were now accomplished for the fulfilment of Scripture—or, that He said, *I thirst*, in order to that fulfilment? And if we take it in thi

latter sense, then does it mean that Jesus said, *I thirst*, on purpose to fulfil Scripture—or, that St John sees in that saying a fulfilment of Scripture, not conscious on Christ's part, but ordained from above?

We cannot wholly evade these questions, for the very reading of the verse is affected by it. Shall we say, *Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished that the Scripture might be fulfilled—saith, I thirst?* or shall we say, *Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished—that the Scripture might be fulfilled saith, I thirst?* And if the latter, then in what sense—intentionally, or unconsciously—*that the Scripture might be fulfilled?*

In trying to answer this question, let us first say this, and say it strongly, that the suffering was actual. The cry was a real cry. It is said that thirst is a keener pain even than hunger. It is said that thirst, which is commonly a large part of the pain of dying, was characteristic of crucifixion. Since the evening before, Christ had tasted neither bread nor water. Think of the Agony in the Garden, with its sweat like drops of blood. Think of the long trials, six in number, with all their harassing incidents and intermediate walks and waitings. Think of that frightful scourging, itself death to many. Think then of the journey

to the Cross, with its dreadful burden. Think, lastly, of the Cross itself—its five or six hours already past, of fatigue, and fever, and festering wounds—think of all this, and say, The thirst was real. The cry was the confession of a suffering body, as the cry before it was the confession of a suffering soul. Before we think of any other meaning of the cry, let us remember this. The human body was suffering beyond our utmost imagination. This, too, was the fruit of sin—of our sin—let each one say, of mine!

But does it now detract from the reality, from the simplicity, of this *I thirst*, to see in it yet one thing more—one thing, which differenced it from the cry of a mere man, and made it characteristic of the Divine Son Himself?

Through all those long hours there had been no mention of the body. The word “pain” had not crossed the door of the lips. Desertion—the hiding of the face of God—the interception of the sunbeam of the Divine Love—the being left alone with a world’s sin—the feeling that sin all around and all over Him, and God gone away—this had wrung from Him a cry such as earth never heard: but there was no mention, in that cry, of the body. Why was the thirst named now and not sooner? Why was the silence broken at last, just when the agony was near its ending?

Some have said, It was now as it was in the Temptation. Not till the forty days were ended, did Jesus hunger. During that long fast He was pre-occupied with conflict. Only at its close did He become conscious of hunger. So was it now. The more bitter spiritual conflict of the Cross engrossed the spirit of the dying Warrior—*when it was ended, He afterward thirsted.*

We do not feel this account satisfactory. The conflict, we think, ended only with the death. We think that the darkness, physical and mental, lasted till the last breath. Even in the parallel of the Temptation, we remember that the hungering was prior to the severest conflict of all, and furnished its occasion. It was the hunger, the conscious hunger, which suggested the temptation, Make this stone bread.

He who had suppressed till now every complaint, every confession, of pain, could have done so still ; could have died silent ; might even have seemed, had this been all, the more of a hero, and the more of a martyr, for doing so.

Is it then inconceivable, that the thought of a Scripture still unfulfilled to the letter was present to the soul of the dying Master, and that He consciously and intentionally spoke the one little word which would give this last sign to His own when they should

wake from their present stupefaction? To some hearts—not the coldest or least spiritual in the Congregation—it may even appear as an added jewel in the Saviour's Crown, that he cared thus, in His last anguish, for the honour of God's Word in its least obvious, least obtrusive particular, and paid to the importance of its smallest, its obscurest jot and tittle, a tribute which He had resolutely refused to the loudest, the most imperious demand of a tortured, mangled, agonized body. *That the Scripture might be fulfilled, He saith, I thirst.* So we shall read it.

Of the 69th Psalm it may be said, as it was said last week of the 22nd, that its original application is harder to read than its Messianic. Those words of uttermost distress and desolation, mingled with the assertion of the absolute sinlessness of the sufferer, of the fearful consequences of their sin to His persecutors, and of the mighty issues involved in His own eventual exaltation, are all too deep and too grand to be fulfilled in any human author. They point onward to One in whose case—whether in its sorrow or in its glory—hyperbole is impossible, and to whom alone could the particular expressions apply in their strictness, *For Thy sake I have borne reproach: shame hath covered my face: I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children: for*

the zeal of Thine house hath eaten me up: and the reproaches of them that reproached Thee are fallen upon me...Reproach hath broken my heart, I am full of heaviness: I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none: They gave me gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

There was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to His mouth.

All the Evangelists mention this *vinegar*; but each one distinctively.

St Matthew speaks of *vinegar mingled with gall* offered to Jesus on the first arrival at Calvary, of which, *when He had tasted it, He would not drink.*

St Mark calls this vinegar *wine mingled with myrrh*, and it has been supposed by many to have been a stupifying draught, commonly offered, in a sort of rude mercy, before an execution, and refused by Jesus that He might pass, in the full vigour of thought and feeling, through the awful scenes of the Passion and the Propitiation.

St Luke, alone, speaks of this as one feature of the mockery which surrounded the Cross, that *the soldiers came to Him, offering Him vinegar*—with the pretence of serving wine at a royal table—and calling Him, as

the King of the Jews, to vindicate His claim by *saving Himself*.

St Matthew and St Mark, as well as St John, describe the offer of the vinegar at the close of the sufferings—they connecting it, rather, with the *Eloi*—he alone recording, *I thirst*.

When I was thirsty, they gave me vinegar to drink.

(1) Jesus, on the Cross, is *made in all things like unto His brethren*.

Much, much, was His own. We intermeddle not, cannot intermeddle, in the *Eloi*, or in the *Τετέλεσται*. We may, or may not, pass through any of the experiences, however softened and alleviated, of unkindness, of ingratitude, of isolation, of desertion: certainly we cannot know the peculiarity of that *forsaking* which was the bitterest of all the ingredients of the Saviour's cup of trembling. But in one thing it is more than probable that we shall, any or all of us, be like Christ—namely, in some pains of dying; in the bodily distress of restlessness, of faintness, of exhaustion, of this very pain of thirst: through these, or some of these, if not through sharper fires of suffering, lies, for most men, the way to death and the grave: shall we be able, shall we have grace, to recall, in that trying hour, the thought of Him who, knowing that all else was now accomplished, said, *I thirst*—mindful

still of God's Word—mindful still of man's consolation?

(2) Jesus, on the Cross, shows us what His Gospel is and is not.

There have been religions which professed insensibility. To renounce, to trample underfoot, to annihilate the body, has been their dream and their falsehood. They would have thought it a weakness in their founder to say in death, *I thirst*. They would have counted it a proof that the victory of the higher nature was in him incomplete, because the goal of impassiveness and impassibility was not by him arrived at. Our Master is human, as well as Divine—*Son of Man* is His title—He has felt, and therefore He feels with, the infirmities of sense and flesh, yet *without sin*: therefore, not least, He suits, He *becomes* us, because He teaches us, in Himself, not to make *natural* the opposite of *spiritual*—teaches us, in Himself, to be just in our estimates, real in our appreciations, as well as brave in our endurances, and unsparing in our sacrifices.

(3) Jesus, on the Cross, bids us to count nothing small which concerns the will, the word, the revelation of God. That this one little verse of the 69th Psalm might be fulfilled, hidden away though it was amongst a multitude of apparently more important particulars,

He, in His agony and in His desolation, thought His work incomplete unless He said, *I thirst*. How memorable, and how monitory, that Divine self-recollection! How it reproves, in us, the negligent, the slovenly, the half-disdainful treatment which we have thought sufficient, not for Psalmists only or Prophets, but for the very Apostles, yea for the very words, and for the very narrative of the life and death, of Jesus! How it urges us to pray with double earnestness, henceforth, the prayer which the Church's Litany has put into our mouth, *From hardness of heart, and contempt of Thy Word and Commandment, Good Lord, deliver us!*

(4) Finally, Jesus, on the Cross, said, not literally only but typically also, *I thirst*. It is an application, but not, surely, a distortion, of the fifth Word, to read it thus, in conclusion, as a spiritual saying.

My soul is athirst for God, yea, for the living God: when shall I come—O soon, surely, now—to appear before the Presence, to rest for ever in the Home, in the bosom, of God. What must that *thirst* have been, at that moment, to Him whose life it had been, below, to do the Will, to finish the Work! O, as the hour approached for that joyous release, not from the privations, not from the pains, but from the sin-seeing, sin-touching, and sin-bearing of Earth, what must

have been the *thirst* for that return and for that reunion!

And was there no second, no sister thirst, earthwards? When He said, *If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink*, did not He Himself, if it might be said, thirst for that thirsting? thirst, in other words, for that awakening appetite, in the sinner, for God and heaven, for everlasting rest and peace, which He is ready, which He is present, here and now, to satisfy out of the fulness of God? If the prophetic word is true, *He shall see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied*—if we read that word aright, in its context, as describing the joy of Christ in heaven over sinners saved and souls rescued—what must the thirst of Christ still be, as He looks upon His earth, yea, as He looks upon His Church, in its present chequered state, of weak faith, sinful life, and languid charity!

Let not our contemplation of the Cross on which He died for us fade away into the old indifference. Let us give ourselves afresh to Him whose compassions, eighteen centuries after the Crucifixion, are *new every morning*. To us, to each of us, He says, *I thirst*, and it is for a love responsive to His love, and a *weakness* willing to be *made strong* in Him.

VI.

JOHN XIX. 30.

It is finished.

THE first three Words from the Cross seem to have been spread over the first three hours of the Crucifixion. The last four appear to have followed each other in quick succession. The prayer for the crucifiers was probably uttered during the crucifying. The promise to the dying robber must have left time, before it, for the transition from reviling to penitence, for a work of Divine grace, gradual, however rapid. The charge to St John, *Behold thy mother*, was prior to the supernatural darkness which began at noon. Three hours of absolute silence followed. St Matthew and St Mark date the darkness, and expressly place the *Eloi* at the end of it. *From the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour: and about the ninth hour*—St Mark says, *at the ninth hour*—*Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli,*

lama sabachthani! The space left is brief, and within it are the three Words, *I thirst—It is finished—and, Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.*

St John, who alone records them, brings very closely together the Διψῶ and the Τετέλεσται, and represents the latter as immediately preceding the Death. It is probable that the last four utterances occupied but a few moments.

The last but one, of these four, is our subject tonight. It consists, like the one before it, of a single word in the Greek—a word, of which the immense weight cannot be exaggerated—may be said to have in it the whole of the Gospel, to be the *gathering together in one* of all the past and all the future, of two eternities, of things in heaven and things in earth.

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished.

The word is the same which is rendered in the 28th verse *accomplished*. *After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.* An attempt ought to have been made to preserve the identity in translation. In some respects *accomplished* is the better rendering. For it is the known peculiarity of the word, in the original language, that it expresses not the ending but the perfecting of the thing spoken of,

not the idea of a thing done and done with, but the idea of a thing matured and perfected, brought to the fulness of its conception, to the terminus of its journey or the goal of its race. *It is finished* is a totally different thought from *It is ended*. It would be a most inadequate, a most unworthy, a really unbelieving interpretation of its use here, to refer it to the mere closing of the life, cessation of the work, or termination of the sufferings. The word itself teaches a different lesson, and shows us that the very smallest, if any, part of the thought breathed in it was that of anticipated relief from the long misery and torture and anguish of the body.

Our Saviour had used the word in life, as He here uses it in death.

I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!...Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and all things that are written by the prophets concerning the Son of Man shall be accomplished: for He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge Him, and put Him to death: and the third day He shall rise again....I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And He was numbered with the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end, have a scope and an aim,

in which alone they can rest and find accomplishment.

These earlier uses of this great word by our Lord Himself—all recorded by one Evangelist, St Luke—are His own sacred interpretation of the *Τετέλεσται* of the Cross. *It is finished*, is not, *It is ended*, but, *It is accomplished*. That which was to be done, that which was to be borne, that which was to be manifested, that which was to be effected—*was* to be, because it was written, because it was foretold, because it was promised, in that infallible Word which is the revelation of the unchangeable Will—behold, it is accomplished! it *has an end*, and, behold, it has attained it!

Such a saying as this is less for preaching than for pondering. Yet we must not shrink from the effort to guide your thoughts: may God teach, enable, and bless!

1. One thing strikes us—suggested by the very word. In Christ, whether in His life, His word, or His work, there is accomplishment, but there is no ending. Nothing of His perishes. *It is finished*, is only true when it is read as *It is accomplished*.

That life, of toil, obloquy, and suffering, was it only a passing fleeting thing, three and thirty years long, just got through, and then laid aside and done

with, as having served its purpose, and then gone back into the great eternity which swallows up and drowns it? Those words, of truth, holiness, and wisdom, spoken once in a remote, obscure province of an Empire which knew nothing of them, which only occupied itself, when it was at last compelled to take some notice, in forcing those who treasured them to deny and blaspheme their Master—are those words yet, eighteen centuries afterwards, done with? That work, which professed to be the reconciliation of a sinful world to God, by the sacrifice, and by the life after death, of a Divine Person incorporated in our nature—was that work finished, or was it only accomplished, upon the Cross on Calvary? Answer, ye who have found in it peace and emancipation; ye who feel in yourselves that, if it could fail you or be proved a lie, your very sun would set at noonday, and leave you in a darkness that might be felt! *Accomplished*, not *ended*, is that, in every part of it, to which Christ has once set His hand. When He said, *It is finished*, He spoke of a life so lived as that it should be the pattern of all lives; of words so spoken as that they should be the light and the guide of all wayfarers and all toilers; of a work so done as that whosoever, in all ages and in all lands, would lay hold upon it and make it his own, should find it absolute rest,

everlasting strength. Not an ending, but a beginning—the establishment, for ever, of a new relationship between God and the sinner—the bringing in of a Divine righteousness, and the opening of a perpetual access to a forgiving, comforting, sanctifying God—all this, through the perfect obedience and absolute self-sacrifice of a Saviour, given, and giving, and Almighty to save—this is something, in poor human words, of the *It is finished*: in this sense, taught of Him, thousands of thousands have found it true, and are at this moment, on earth and in Paradise, swelling the hymn of praise and thanksgiving, *Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests...to Him be glory.*

2. *It is finished.* How mysterious that impersonal passive! Even the *it*, with all its vagueness, is added in the English—is not in the Greek. Who shall presume to speak where Christ has not spoken? *It is finished.* All that God purposed, in the eternal past, for the restoration, for the reconciliation, for the redemption, of fallen man. All that prophets and righteous men desired to see and saw not, as to the possible future of a distressed, sin-ruined, yet not absolutely God-deserted race. All that human nature, by the help of its lawgivers and philosophers, had

vaguely and feebly struggled after, for the enlightenment of a sin-darkened intellect and the emancipation of a sin-bound will. All that the Divine discipline, of law moral and ritual, had written, by slow and painful experience, upon the mind and the heart of one disobedient and gainsaying people. All that Christ Himself, present in humanity, had quickened into livelier action, of feeling and conscience, of aspiration and hope. All these elements of a conceivable amelioration are knit into one mighty redemption in the Cross of Jesus Christ. Sin borne, sin taken, *sin become*, for us—sin henceforth an unnecessary burden for one struggling, sorrowing, praying soul—all is indeed finished and accomplished for ever: *whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.*

And although ages and generations must yet run their course, on an earth still dark with pain and woe and death—although, in this sense, all is not finished and not accomplished on that Cross on which indeed the Saviour Himself (when He thus spoke) had yet to die—nevertheless He who sees the end from the beginning, and in the assurance of a conscious Omnipotence can call things that are not as though they were, excludes not even the future from His view when He says, *It is finished*; knows that in the Cross is the basis of the universal, the eternal *refreshing*;

beholds from the Cross the sorrows of a Church, yea, the sins of a Christendom, without dismay or discouragement, knowing that, if not before, *at evening it shall be light*—beholding a thousand years as one day, and projecting already upon the darkness of time the compensating overwhelming brilliance of an infinite and everlasting glory.

3. *It is finished.* Hear in this word the Gospel preached by Christ—preached from the Cross.

How unlike—shall we confess it?—the so-called Gospel from the lips of man !

Both in its fulness, and in its solemnity, how unlike !

Who, almost, possesses that key to the heart's heart of the sinner, which is the all-sufficiency, without limit and without qualification, of the merits and death of Jesus Christ ? Who does not mingle, in his offer of the Gospel, something of foregoing or accompanying condition—either repentance or effort, either feeling or promise—either the not having too deeply sinned, or the becoming dust and ashes of an already hopeful sorrow ? Who dares to carry in an open hand, to utter with ungrudging lips, to press with the confidence of a heart which has tried and found it true, the *It is finished* of the sixth Word from Calvary ? Till we do so, we have done nothing. Let us know that the heart

of the sinner is hard, is mistrustful, is suspicious of a Gospel. It will never believe that the thoughts of God are quite so unlike ours, as to say, at once, and as His first word, *It is finished*. Sin red as crimson is made white as snow by an absolute atonement; righteousness, far off from thee as is the seventh heaven from the bottomless pit of hell, is brought down to thee, brought into thee, by the blood of Christ. Dwell not in the charnel-house of thy guilt and of thy despair, when Christ says, *It is finished*; and when He means that for thee, even for thee, the thing which is finished, the thing which is accomplished, is forgiveness, is acceptance, is sanctification, is glory.

The holiness of the Gospel, its freedom from abuse and distortion, lies not in any antecedent condition, nor in any attendant qualification. The Gospel of the accomplishment and the finishing is a free Gospel. Herein lies its power; herein, for such as will receive it, lies its grace to save.

The holiness of the Gospel, that which makes it a sanctifying power, is the fact that it comes to us from the Cross. He who hears from the Cross, *It is finished*, knows that there can be no sin in it. The fact that death, such a death, the death of the Son of God, the death of the Cross, was needful, was insisted

upon, was gone through with, the Divine Son suffering, the Divine Father inflicting—O, this shows that the Gospel which is so free is not lax nor indulgent: this is what makes the finished work a serious, a solemn, a severe work, also: trust your Gospel, modify it not, qualify it not, to make it more probable, safer, more moral, less liable to perversion: *the foolishness of God is wiser than man*, and God said, *It is finished*—all is done—only believe. But see that you preach it as a Gospel from a Cross, as a message from a dying Lord: dying because sin is so black, and because nothing but the blood of the Son of God could procure its pardon and its obliteration!

It is finished.

Brethren! what shall they do, who leave Christ out of their Gospel? I know that there are those who find it easier to approach God, Himself by Himself, than to approach Him through Christ. They see not why God should be less ready, less sure, to forgive, than an earthly parent to overlook the ill temper or the unruliness of his child. They think that it detracts from the freedom and the largeness of love that it should want a Mediator, or that it should wait for an Atonement. Thus, while they call themselves Christians, they have no real faith in the Cross; at the most, they regard it

but as a token of sympathy, a condescension to humanity, or an example of self-devotion, and never throw themselves upon its atoning grace, as the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, who actually bears and takes away the sins of the world.

We cannot thus play fast and loose with the Gospel. He who reads his Bible, he who lives by the Gospels and Epistles as his light and his guide, must find that the keystone of the arch is the Atonement; must find *It is finished*, in the sense of the accomplishment of the sacrifice and the propitiation for sin, written everywhere upon every doctrine and every precept and every promise of the Gospel. And we will dare to add, that, whosoever knows himself—in other words, whosoever is in the habit of honestly unbosoming himself in God's presence, day and night, as just that which he is, in habits of life, in habits of speech, in habits of thought—will assuredly find that in himself to which an atonement is suitable, is merciful, is necessary: if he cannot see how, he can see that such a Saviour *became* him, suited his case, met his wants, assured his hopes; and he can trust God not to have misled him on a point so vital—not to disappoint him when, in a sense of his need, and with a humble trust in God's Word he casts himself at the foot of the Cross, and prays for mercy and

grace definitely on the strength of the finished work of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It is finished. Then there is room for us. Not faithless, but believing—so let us come. And when, after a life spent in humble reliance upon the *Τετέλεσται* of Jesus Christ, we ourselves at last tread the dark valley and prepare for the crossing of the mysterious stream; may we be able then to catch the echo of the sixth Word from the Cross, and to say, with St Paul, *I have finished my course—In the hour of death, and in the day of judgment, Good Lord, deliver me!*

VII.

LUKE XXIII. 46.

Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.

THE seventh Word is before us. It might have seemed as though the sixth left no room for it. *It is finished*—and yet there is a word more. Yes, for that was a farewell to earth, and this is a welcome to heaven. That was the close of the work, this is the anticipation of the rest. That was retrospect, this is prospect.

Without this last word, not only would the seven-fold perfection have been shorn of its crown, there would have been also the absence of one all-sustaining all-comforting thought, which has done more, perhaps, than any other to make Christ the light of our darkness and the life of our death.

There are many ways in which the Seven Words have been, as it were, compared and contrasted in

their doctrine and in their consolation. No arrangement is, perhaps, more satisfactory or more beautiful than *this*, the simplest and most obvious of all. The first two speak mercy to sinners; the prayer for the crucifiers, and the promise to the robber. The next two speak comfort to the sorrowful—the desolate childless widow, and the soul deserted of its God. The last three speak strength to the dying—the strength of a Saviour's sympathy with bodily anguish, the strength of a Saviour's work perfected and all-availing, the strength of a Saviour's self-commendation, and commendation, with Himself, of us, into the hands of a living, a known, and a loving Father.

We owe to St Luke alone the first, and the last, of the seven sayings; the prayer for the murderers, and the prayer at the point of departure. Each of these has *Father* for its first word: these two, and not the others. Not only was this the key-word of His whole doctrine—the one word of His childhood, *my Father's business*; the first word of His ministry, *my Father's house*; the starting-point and ground-work of His whole precept of prayer, *When ye pray, say, Our Father*—there is more in it here, even than in all those other places. For here He is teaching, as nowhere else was it possible, that the Divine relationship of child and father is constant

and invariable through all circumstances and against all appearances; that not only does it survive the nailing to a Cross, the surrender to the utmost rage and fury of enemies and persecutors, the withholding of all visible succour, of all active interference, amidst the utmost extremities of a suffering even unto death; but is also—a harder lesson to learn—absolutely independent of spiritual experiences of distress and desertion, unaffected by the withdrawal of all conscious enjoyment of the love which is the life, even by the inability, up to the very latest moment of earthly existence, to apprehend or to realize one faintest ray of the light of that countenance, the hiding away of which is the obliteration of all comfort and of all peace. *Father* outlives both these, both the bodily surrender and the spiritual desolation. *Father, forgive them...Father, into Thy hands...*

In all but this first word, which even saints and righteous men of old had not ventured to appropriate ere Christ came, the seventh utterance from the Cross, like the fourth, is directly drawn from the Old Testament Scriptures. *Into Thy hands I commend my spirit*, is the saying of the 31st Psalm. It has been noticed—and the remark may be instructive—that the 31st Psalm, unlike the 22nd, has little or nothing in it of special prediction of Christ. Great

distress, great suffering, is indeed expressed in it: obloquy, isolation, contempt, persecution, are the experiences of the writer: but they are thoroughly human experiences—there is no particular which might not have found its fulfilment in the circumstances of the man. And the feeling expressed is just that of a devout and holy person, turning to God in his trouble, and finding cause, ere his harp is hung up, to exchange the dirge of lament for the pæan of exultation. It is from such a Psalm that the dying word of Christ is taken, as though He would mark the entireness of His incorporation with us in that faith and in that hope of which He is at once the Author and the Example to the Church which is His body.

It ought to endear to us the Book of Psalms, to find it thus furnishing to the suffering and dying Saviour the very words of His communication with a Father in heaven. How unlike our slight knowledge, our careless use, our jesting quotations, our half-doubting half-patronizing discussions, of Holy Scripture, was the treatment of it by Him who might, but for our sake, have dispensed with it for profiting! That half-Bible, from Genesis to Malachi, was the Saviour's study and meditation till it became a part of Him. It was the literature of His

education, the liturgy of His worship, the storehouse of His ministry, the armoury of His controversy, His panoply in temptation, His natural, His spontaneous utterance in the hour of death. *Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.*

The Psalmist spoke of life, of that committal of all cares and all fears into the keeping of One mighty to save, which is the secret of tranquillity and the secret of strength. And St Paul, using the same figure, of a trust and a deposit, speaks of his self-commendation as already made—made in life, for time and eternity—I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him—my deposit is the exact rendering—against that day, the day of His coming and of the final judgment. St Peter also, still employing the same words, bids those who suffer according to the will of God—whether in life or unto death—to commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator. That which ought to be the first act of a Christian resolving for Christ—that which ought to be the daily act of a Christian feeling his weakness and knowing where alone it can be strengthened out of itself—that which ought to be the special act of a Christian entering into temptation, or incurring any foreseen danger of soul or body—

risers into a more solemn, a more sacred sense still, when it is the last act of expiring consciousness, sealing the dedication of a life by the dedication of a death. Christ makes it here His last utterance. In the very act of this self-entrusting to One out of sight, He passes through the gate which imprisons the living, into the mysterious freedom, into the unbounded capacities, of One *put to death in the flesh*, but at the very same moment (as we read St Peter's words) *quickened in the spirit*.

Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.

Brethren! the words have two aspects, and the first of these is towards our Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

In this one Week of the year, in which we commemorate His Cross and Passion, it ought to be the foremost thought of each one of us, how we can honour Him in the appreciation of what He did and suffered in working out our salvation. There have never been wanting, in any age, scoffers who could show their evil skill in discovering disparagements of the Lord who bought them. Such things do not surprise us in the writings of open unbelievers. It is in the power of any one, warned by the name

or the title-page, to avoid them and pass them by. Alas! it is not only in books, and it is not only in the words of professed infidels, that this sort of gloss is now put upon the sayings—even upon those which one should have hoped would be held sacred, the last sayings, the sayings upon the Cross itself—of Him who is our Hope. Even here, as is our feeling towards Him, so will be our construction. If we have felt our sins; if we have felt our need of salvation; if we have felt that in Jesus Christ and Him crucified there is offered to us just that which we need, on the footing of a Divine Person made Man, made in all things like us, but with this difference, that, being Himself *without sin*, He was able to be *made sin for us*; if, feeling the suitableness of this Saviour to us, and satisfied of the great leading proofs of His being that which we call Him, we have also come to God through Him for pardon and life; then first we are qualified to enter into His words as the Providence of God has caused them, lest they should be lost or spoilt in oral tradition, to be written down for us, one here and one there, in the holy records which we call the Gospels. We must come to Him before we can understand Him. Day by day we are taught the blindness, in these matters, of those who *say, We see.*

We find them groping at noonday as in the darkness, *wearying themselves to find the door*; we find them indeed (as a Prophet has written) in desolate places as blind, helpless, hopeless men. For them, the Agony in the Garden is the confession of a failure: the cry from the Cross, *Why hast thou forsaken?* is the avowal of a Divine refusal: *It is finished* means *All is lost*: *Into Thy hands I commend my spirit* is the depressed discomfited utterance of One who has laboured in vain and can but hope to be saved Himself *so as by fire*.

Brethren! be not ye alarmed, nor shaken in your stedfastness, by such signs of the times. See rather a new proof of the Apostle's saying, *Not many wise men after the flesh*, not many learned, not many Scribes or Rabbis, *are called*. Rather has God chosen the weak things of the earth to put to shame the mighty, and that no flesh may glory in His presence. These men have not entered by the door: they would climb up some other way—the way of self-confidence and pride and mutual flattery, and therefore the ways of God are hid from their eyes.

Let these sad experiences only make us more anxious so to seek that we may find, so to set out that we may arrive. Let us look well to our reasons for believing. Let us be able to give an answer, at

least when we ask *ourselves* a reason of the hope that is in us. And although we ought to give weight to what are commonly called evidences—to those, more especially, which lie in the holy lives and happy deaths of Christian men, all along these eighteen hundred years and more since Christ died on Calvary—yet let us not rest with anything short of the inward witness; the *I have heard Him myself, and know*—know that I have found in Him life from the dead, strength out of weakness, and a bright hope after blank despair.

Then for the first time we shall be intelligent scholars in the school of God's Word. Then we shall enter into the wisdom, into the power, into the Divinity, of Christ's sayings as they are written down in this Book. When we hear Him, in the first sharpness of His pain, praying for His torturers; when we hear Him promising to the dying sinner beside Him a place with Him that day in Paradise; when we hear Him committing His mother to the beloved disciple—showing such a discernment of the needs and woes of an earth which He was Himself leaving for heaven; when we hear Him suffering under such a load of sins, long as time and wide as the world, feeling them so near Him, so wrapped round Him, so entering into Him, that it was as if

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God had deserted Him for taking them upon Him and *becoming* them; when we hear Him cry out in the bitterness of the bodily thirst, yet, even in doing so, caring for the exactness of God's Word of prophecy, and for the satisfaction of the faith of those for whom He was dying; when we hear Him say at last, *It is finished*, the warfare is accomplished, the victory won, atonement made, heaven opened for all who believe; when, finally, turning His latest thought of all to the God known and loved and trusted in, we hear Him cry, amidst all the horror and darkness and anguish, *Father, into Thy hand I commit my spirit*; we shall feel that here, in this sevenfold utterance of the mind that was in Christ, we have indeed the rightful Owner of our lives and of our hearts; we shall cry out to Him, with the energy of all that is within us, no longer faithless but believing, *My Lord, and my God!*

The words before us have an aspect, also, towards ourselves. What they were from Him we have feebly sought to interpret. But no one of the seven sayings is more clearly meant for instruction. We know not the time nor the manner, but the fact of our own death is the one certain thing for all of us. There is only one thing which could prevent it—

and even that one thing is so awful, and has an accompaniment (we are told in Scripture) so much like death, that it scarcely modifies the sweeping statement, *We must all die*. It is this thought which makes the solemnity of all gatherings. Of these hundreds, or of these thousands, which shall be left fifty years hence—which, certainly, a hundred? That we can trifle, with this before us, is the marvel of life. The wise man, the tolerably sensible man, feels that a necessity is laid upon him of making provision for that end. There is only one thought, one utterance, which can be satisfactory, even to ourselves, then, and it is here tonight in our view. In this one thing, we must not only learn from, but actually make our own, the Master's Word. The only allowable modification of it—and that is so but in form—is that of the first martyr, *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit*. That prayer, of the antiquity of which there can be no question, shows what the first Christians thought of Christ. That prayer could never have had place in that ancient record, the Acts of the Apostles, if it did not represent the feeling of the Church of that age concerning the Divinity of the Saviour. It matters not which form be ours, *Father, through Jesus*—or *Lord Jesus, one with God*—receive, to Thee I commit, my spirit! The very words of

Christ Himself have been the dying words of thousands of His saints. "Blessed are they," wrote the great Reformer, "who die not only for the Lord, as martyrs, not only in the Lord, as all believers, but likewise with the Lord, as breathing forth their lives in these words, *Into Thy hands I commend my spirit.*" They were his last words, and of many his fellow-reformers and fellow-witnesses in all lands.

That they may be ours, in form or in substance, much must go before. They must be the meditation of the life. Think how dark is death to the unbeliever. Even to the Christian, let no man deny it, death has its shade. We are told little in Scripture, save of its one hope, the presence of a known Person beyond. To the sceptic how dark! Compare with his thoughts—his dream of absorption, or engulfment, or ceasing to be—or else his vague fancy, of qualities perfected or disappearing, of the annihilation of defects and survivorship of excellences—or else, of a general purgatory, from which reconciliations, compensations, exposures and purifications, shall send men forth, at last, all alike saved—compare with these idle guessings and gropings, in which scarce two men agree, and those who agree confess that they are at hopeless irreconcilable variance with the Bible, the calm, stedfast, supporting revelation given

us in the expiring word of Jesus Christ. *Father, into Thy hands*: there is a Person in that invisible world which flesh and blood cannot enter; a living, acting, hearing, most powerful Person—for the thing asked of Him is what no other being, in earth or in heaven, could be even dreamed of in connexion with; a Person already known, and known in the most substantive, durable, and sustaining of all relations—as a Father: and to Him, out of sight, not to be apprehended by sense, the dying man, by an act of the will, commits a deposit, altogether different from any earthly treasure of silver or gold, of houses or lands—his own spirit; this invisible thing which is the life; which has in it the will and the affections, the faculty of knowing, and the faculty of loving, and (most of all and most comprehensive) the faculty of enjoying and of being happy: *Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit.*

Brethren! let us pause, and let us think. The text is a test also. If death should come suddenly, come tonight or tomorrow night, to one of us—and we have seen, this last day or two, that neither health, nor comparative youth, nor great station, nor national and even international importance, can guarantee any man from that approach—are we ready with that commendatory prayer in departing, *Father—*

and, *Into Thy hands?* O, we cannot on the sudden either realize that relationship or cast our all upon it! O utter bewilderment—O darkness that may be felt—worst of all if not felt—in which a man goes out to make his first acquaintance with the Invisible! What kind of *Τετέλεσται* shall be thine? Is the work given thee—all men have a work—done, or even in doing? Ask thyself this, and then pray—pray as a dying man would pray if he knew all—that the Father who is in secret will be found of thee, will Himself seek thee—that He may be felt now as near, and dear, and long-suffering, and strong to save—so that, when the last breath is drawn, He may meet, He may receive, He may bless and save—setting thee among His own, and *in the ages to come showing thee the riches of His grace, in His kindness toward thee through Christ Jesus.*

THE REIGN OF SIN.

I.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SIN.

ROMANS V. 21.

That as sin hath reigned...even so might grace reign.

THERE is one use of Lent, as to the excellence of which there can be no doubt—a deepening of the sense of sin.

If there is such a thing as Sin—if it is a fact—a root-fact, one out of which other facts, I had almost said all other facts, sprout and grow—if it is a thing which enters into everything, into all our relations towards God, towards other men, and towards ourselves—if, moreover, it is a secret thing, one which we can neither see nor touch nor smell, one which may be lurking in us unnoticed, corrupting, infecting, poisoning the very life of the life without our being compelled to give heed to it—surely we have here reason

upon reason why the Church, why the Gospel, why our Lord, why God our Father, should say to us, Look into it—be not deceived—sleep not the sleep of death—know what you are, whatever it may cost you—know where you are, in truth, not in seeming, though that knowledge may make you sadder as well as wiser, or constrain you to make very considerable changes in your habits both of thought and life.

I would add one word, by way of reconciling us all to this search, to this scrutiny. Reality, the thing that is, is always happier, as well as better, than the false seeming, the fair fallacious show, which already suspects itself, and must ~~soon~~ come to nothing. To **deepen** the sense of sin is to lay a foundation, upon the solid living rock, for everlasting peace. The happiest moments in your life—you know it—have been those in which, for once, you saw yourselves as you were—put your mouth in the dust, and abhorred yourselves in dust and ashes. That was because, for once, you were true—true men before the true God—and because God's truth is but another name for God's mercy and for God's love. To know the worst is to know the best. To be at one with the truth, to be face to face with the true One, is awful indeed, but it is healing, it is strengthening, it is comforting, too.

Another word I would say, in attraction towards my subject—and that is as to the simplicity, the comprehensiveness, of the conviction of sin. Some men say that you have no real sense of sin until you have dragged out from the caverns of memory each particular act and word and thought recorded against you, and confessed each one, perhaps to a priest, certainly to God, minutely and in all its heinousness, with separate contrition and separate supplication concerning each one. I believe that in these, as in other spiritual matters, God has many alternatives and many ~~bests~~. A man may be a real man and a true penitent, who has plunged into the fountain opened for sin, not, as it were, piecemeal, limb by limb and sin by sin, but whole and at once, as all guilty, all vile, wanting an entire pardon and an entire cleansing. This is not necessarily an indolent or perfunctory kind of repentance: it may be the result of the very deepest and most thorough self-knowledge, of the very deepest and most thorough faith in the sufficiency of Jesus Christ for purifying. There is nothing more beautiful, nothing (I believe) more true in the sight of God, or more touchingly humble in the sight of man, than the spirit of him who feels himself absolutely vile and worthless, and frames every prayer to God, and every dealing (in

speech and act) with his fellow, upon the supposition, upon the conviction, that he himself is nothing, has nothing, deserves nothing but hell, and is indeed less than the least, the very chief of sinners.

Make room for such a penitent in your systems and in your sympathies—for it may be, ye prescribers of rules and terms, that he shall enter the kingdom of God before you.

I would seek then, depending upon the help of God, to use this present season in some plain honest suggestions upon that 'Reign of Sin' of which St Paul speaks in the text. Sometimes we may take particular instances—sins of word, sins of omission, the deceitfulness of sin, sin against the Holy Ghost, and such like. Tonight, on this first evening of Lent, we will keep to more general thoughts, seeking only to quicken that general sense of sin of which we have spoken.

It is very difficult to choose a framework for this endeavour. I have hoped that there might be a response in these hearts to a few clauses of our Church's old Confession—that with which we begin our Public Worship day by day and Sunday by Sunday—that which is no less familiar, in sound at least, to the youngest than to the eldest of my hearers, and which has the peculiar charm not only of long

and manifold association, but also of brief expression and of picturesque illustration. To stand aside and let it speak, will be my object, in what remains.

It presents sin to us in various aspects. Metaphysicians, as well as theologians, have busied themselves in the definition, the dissection, the analysis, of sin. Is it a positive, or a negative? Is it the presence, or the absence, of something? Is it an accident, or a necessity, of being? Is it a part of man's nature, or does it in each case originate with the individual? Is it indeed against the will of God, in such sense that He wills its annihilation—or is it, on the contrary, one factor in God's whole work, needed to balance other agencies, and, on the whole, contributing to the perfectness of the final result?

The Church, like the Bible, passes by all such speculations as lying out of the direct path of man's duty and of man's profiting. Accepting sin as a fact, letting conscience speak as to its character, and therefore assuming it to be altogether evil, altogether contrary to God's will and to man's welfare, the Church puts upon the lips of all her members the acknowledgment of their own defilement with it, and makes them characterize it, their own share in it, as having four principal qualities.

(1) Sin is error. 'We have erred, and strayed

from Thy ways, like lost sheep.' Thou hadst made a way for us, in which we should go—in which was safety, in which was direction, in which was blessing, in which was progress, under Thy hand, towards the rest and the home prepared for Thy people. From that way, of duty and happiness, we have swerved and strayed, like some silly purposeless sheep from the charge and oversight of its shepherd. We have sinned—and sin is error.

This is that idea of sin—that mildest, perhaps, and least criminatory—which makes it a missing of the way, under whatever influence, towards a distinct and definite end.

God meant us to reach the goal—taught us the rules of the race—marked out the course, and set us within it—showed the barriers which confined it, and the 'mark' in the distance which must be made for. We erred and strayed—would not keep the way—suffered chance or choice, influence or caprice, to divert us from it—and here, after fifteen years, or after fifty years, of nominal running, we are where we are, having utterly missed, or partially missed, the very purpose of our being.

What shall we say, brethren—we who are here before God this evening—have we kept, or have we missed, God's way? Which one, of all this audience,

has so much as seen, so much as started for, that far-off 'mark' in the horizon of his being, which is the Christian's heaven? Perfection—Christ's likeness—the mind that was in Christ—the holiness which alone can see God—call it what you will, lower it as you may to human apprehension, is this the very idea in your heart, as a practical aim and object? Which of us has not lived idly, loosely, at random, in reference to any high aim or any spiritual attainment? This is just 'erring and straying'—just roving and roaming about and around that pathway of life which God had ordered in all things with rule and motive and promise.

Some hearts feel this view of sin as specially real and specially humbling. Men who know that the race of earthly life—ambition, wealth, even pleasure—is not thus run, can feel, when they turn the thought upon the soul, upon eternity, upon God, the folly, the fatuity, the madness, of thus treating the heavenly. They can enter into the confession of 'erring and straying,' with even more of personal self-application than into that of guilt and wrongdoing.

(2) Sin is self-will. 'We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts.'

St Paul seems to make this the very meaning of sin. He speaks of sin as existing, though in a torpid,

dormant, inanimate state, where there is no law to transgress. The 'coming of the commandment,' so graphically described in the 7th chapter of this Epistle, does not create sin—it only revives it—like some sleeping reptile brought suddenly to the fire, and springing from its long lethargy into the display of its strength. The self-will, reigning, even unconsciously, where God's throne ought to be, in the capital and citadel of the being, this is sin in its essence—this it is which we confess against ourselves when we say, 'We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts.'

Thoughts come into our hearts every day, suggestive of pleasures which may be substituted for duties—enjoyments, active or passive, which will put aside irksome toils or reluctant charities—it may be, of such pleasures as are sins too—things which God has forbidden, and which form therefore the clear battleground of obedience and self-indulgence. These are the 'devices' which we here confess. O how fertile is the heart in these! O how unexpected the expansion and the growth of these! Men who have no imagination—who could not write one word of poetry—who have no invention, and no fancy, and no sense of humour—are imaginative enough and to spare, inventive for evil if not for good, when the heart is in

question. What surprises of 'devising' come to us all, when the question is of self-indulgence! Who could have believed, beforehand, what he might come to invent for himself, when he has once let himself go in sinning? 'Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?' he says in calm prospect, in the cold blood of a looker on, when the possibility is named to him by another—and yet, little by little, step by step, he has come to it, by letting God go, and feels himself no 'dog,' but a very rational man, at the end of it.

So much for the 'devices.'

The 'desires' accompanying may be quite natural. It is natural to desire that which the heart paints to us as a good. We cannot altogether prevent the desire. A thing seen to be pleasant, and imagined as possible, must, almost, be desired. The hungry man must desire the loaf of bread. The weary man must desire his rest or his release. The sin is not there. The sin is in the 'following.' Desire firmly resisted—the 'device' resolutely said 'No' to—is no sin. Our Lord was tempted like as we are—He felt the pleasantness of ease, of popularity—yet without sin, because never for one moment did He follow the device or the desire of that which was not good.

Sin is self-will. To whom shall I speak tonight

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as if he knew not how to confess this confession? 'We have followed, too much'—yes, if it were ever so little, it were too much—'the devices and desires of our own hearts.'

(3) Sin is disobedience. 'We have offended against Thy holy laws.'

St John makes this his definition of sin. 'Sin is the transgression of the law.'

It is a cruel kindness which sets grace against law. St Paul says indeed, 'Ye are not under law, but under grace.' And, in another place, 'Law is not made for a righteous man.' But he means this—that there is a state above law, not because law may be safely broken, but because love has taken its place: the law is kept, and something more: not the letter only, but the spirit, has become dear to the man, because he loves God, and would not, so much as in thought, hurt or wound Him.

My brethren! law is a great blessing: it keeps us out of harm's way: it is a fence to us from the power of evil: let us not presume to say that we are above it: I know that a time will come, to all God's servants, when obedience is spontaneous—when the will shall be so conformed to God's will that the two shall move as one. This is the reward sometimes, even upon earth, of long obedience. But we must not fore-

stall it. We must begin by obeying, and end by loving.

It is a good thing for young men and for young Christians to listen diligently even now to God's ten Commandments, as they are read (with great wisdom) Sunday by Sunday, in our Church of England—to listen to them first in their letter, and then in their spirit—remembering who has said that the thought of murder, and the thought of adultery, are, in God's sight, of the nature of the act—that an unkind thought is the one, and that an impure thought is the other. When that is borne in mind, who shall not ask God's mercy (as the Rubric bids us all to do) for his past breach of each one of the Commandments, and God's grace to keep him from the breach of each one of them in the future? And who shall not say, from a very sincere conviction, these words of the General Confession, 'We have offended against Thy holy laws?' Sin is disobedience.

(4) Finally, Sin is disease. 'There is no health in us.'

Strong men, ignorant of ache or pain, full of youth and hope and conscious vigour, say this, and mean it too. Many a puny, pining, consumptive soul is encased in a very healthy body. We do not pretend to say that the three things, a sound body, a sound mind,

and a sound soul, are never—are not often—found together. There is no natural antagonism—quite the contrary—between any two of these. It is ingratitude, or it is affectation, to call either bad health, or a sluggish intellect, a spiritual advantage. It is not so. Let us give God thanks for a body which can work in His service—for a mind which is capable of His glory. Only we say, that sin, wheresoever it is, is a disease—and that all of us have it. ‘There is no man that sinneth not.’ Because we are sinners, all of us, we are all taught to say, ‘And there is no health in us.’

Brethren! we know what we should do if we had an illness. We should get advice. We know what we do when the mind is ill—backward, ignorant, uninstructed—we get it educated. If ‘there is no health in us,’ in a spiritual sense of those words, shall we acquiesce in that condition? If we find that the soul has no appetite for that which is its food—the Word of God, and His Son Jesus Christ who calls Himself the Bread of our life—no power of exercise in the life of God, which is prayer and holy reading and holy communion—no power of work in the things of God, which is, in other words, showing kindness and doing good to the bodies and the minds and the souls of His creatures—confession must run on into prayer,

into effort, into endeavour ; and the disease, which is sin, must be put into the hands of the good Physician, who died and who lives for the very purpose of working this wonderful cure in each one who will come to Him.

Plain words these—I do not think that you who have come together for the sake of ‘the good word,’ will call them too plain. Let us ask Him who alone can give the increase to bless the seed sown. May He instruct by His Holy Spirit those who shall come together in faith and hope on these Lent evenings—giving wisdom to His ministers to teach, and grace to His people to hear the word meekly, to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit.

II.

ORIGINAL SIN.

ROMANS V. 12.

By one man sin entered into the world.

SIN and Grace, the two competitors and combatants of this passage, must be studied and pondered together. 'Where sin abounded,' St Paul says, 'grace did much more abound.' 'That as sin hath reigned...even so might grace reign.' We cannot understand grace, either in its gift or in its life, without first understanding sin, both in its origin, and in its work.

Our subject this evening is Original Sin.

Do not imagine for one moment that you are asked to listen to a theological essay on that abstruse subject. I would bring the matter into your life. I would make it helpful, God helping me, to your

soul's business—which is this—to answer two questions, where? and, whither? what is my state? and, what is my hope? to answer these two questions, to itself, and for use—that, knowing the truth of God concerning the one, it may grasp, with the clutch of the drowning, the truth of God concerning the other.

We will not enter, though it would be deeply interesting, into St Paul's argument, in these ten verses, about the double headship and ancestorship of our race in Adam the sinner and in Christ the Redeemer. The time is short—and the object is, to carry all with us, young and old, into the heart and kernel of our subject. So we shall start, not from a book—though that Book be the Bible—but from the level plain of fact and experience, and not call in the Bible till we want it—till we reach a tangle and a puzzle, out of which God alone, calling to us from the sky, can possibly guide and deliver us.

First, then, all agree in this—

Sin is a fact.

We see it. It has a vitality and a vivacity of being, which compels attention. Shutting the Bible, stopping the ear against sermons, will do nothing towards keeping sin out of sight. To show you sin, a newspaper is almost more than a Bible. Look cursorily over those densely packed columns of

yesterday's newspaper, how many of those columns would there be if sin was not? Whole Professions—the three learned Professions, Church, Law, Medicine—only exist because there is sin; because sin is a fact, and because the workings of sin are real, and because they spread all over the face of this life. And when from the general we pass to the particular, is not sin a fact in human homes, in human lives, damaged, spoilt, made wretched, made abominable, by discontent, by self-will, by self-indulgence, by intemperance, lust, and crime, even where, to begin with, there was every advantage, of birth and wealth, of education and genius and love?

Sin is seen. We all see it.

But is one left behind, when we go on to say, Sin is felt?

Felt in every one. No one is good without a struggle. A daily struggle. What does this mean? No one is perfectly good. Every one, we say—it is a proverb—every one has his faults. What does this mean? Let a child alone, from his infancy, through his boyhood, so far as moral training is concerned, it is no open question how he will turn out—perfectly bad, perfectly miserable. All education, every pretence at education, presumes and presupposes this—that human beings, let alone, run to evil. Again we

ask, What does this mean? It means, that sin is not only seen—in the sense in which we may see an accident, or see a hospital, or see a funeral, as something outside us, something in which we are not, at the time, concerned save as spectators—but that it is felt also—it is a part of ourselves—it is a reality for us, in this sense, that we can neither ignore it without injury, nor will it away because we will.

But further, sin is not only a fact—a seen fact, a felt fact—it is an inheritance too.

Far back as history goes, it never reaches an age without sin. There were always—I speak still of human memories and human records—there were always wars and fightings; there were always lustings and cruelties; there were always attempts, by brute force or law, to coerce and retaliate upon crime; there were always frightful assaults upon weakness, upon ignorance, upon (comparative) innocence. Once these abominations were even regarded as marks of power, badges of superiority. They were even made prerogatives of a vile and a crowded Pantheon. There were not always, not till Christ came, combinations and organizations of virtue and philanthropy. In short, the truth is so, that neither the memory nor the tradition nor the history of man ‘runneth to the contrary,’ but that there was always sin. We have nothing, save

what the Bible may possibly tell us, to set against the primeval antiquity, the aboriginality, the absolute contemporaneousness with the race, of this vile mischievous influence, covert now, now rampant, which we call Sin. For anything that appears, it was always there. It is a fact in the remotest past, as truly as in the immediate visible tangible present.

Now all this must be accounted for.

If no account is given, we shall be charging God—in our hearts, if not with our lips—with the authorship and origination of our evil. What else can we say, than that we were made so? Experience is silent—history is silent—tradition is silent—poetry is silent—fiction itself is silent—as to any other condition of our race than that which has sin in it—then the Creator, if there be a Creator, must take the blame of it—the blame in point of will, if He so constituted us—the blame in point of power, if He would have had it otherwise and could not.

Also to give no account of these things is to make us desperate. If evil is a part of us, in the sense of an original part—if we were so made, that it is natural to us to go astray and start aside from the good, to see the right and seek the evil—then indeed there is no hope for us. Only annihilation—which comes not—could sever us for certain from this fatal

presence and companionship. Destiny is too strong for us—let us sin on and die.

Such reflections may dispose us all to listen, at least with endurance, to any voice which professes to have any information for us on this subject. If it were but a peradventure, if it were but a conjecture, if it were but a dream, let us hear it. And if it speaks to us in the oldest Book in the world—in a Book which thousands have held to be, because they found it to be, not only wholesome but life-giving—a Book which certainly has the key to many things, and which has borne more discussing and more refuting and more calumniating than any work of any age, without being put down or silenced or destroyed by it—shall we not give earnest heed to its account of this terrible blot and stain upon Nature, upon Creation? Shall we not eagerly interrogate this Book concerning this mystery—concerning our life as we live it, and its beginning in the pre-historic past?

Now we must not say that the Bible itself explains this mystery. It does not. It does not attempt to say when or how evil came into being in God's universe. The origination of evil is left unexplained. There was evil before there was sin—man's sin, I mean. Also the record to which we are referring is

obscure in its details. Some read it as an allegory—and yet believe it. It may be true, it may be a revelation, nevertheless.

But this is the great point. The Bible starts with two mighty facts. The first is Creation—the second is the Fall.

A living God made heaven and earth. Said, Let there be light. Said, Let us make man—in our image—after our likeness. Saw all that He had made—and, behold, it was very good.

Into this pure creation Evil, already existing, assumed to exist, found its way. The Fall is the second fact. Not the first. Man was created upright. By a subsequent act, an act of his own, but an act suggested to him from without, he fell from his uprightness.

So then the fact of the Fall has these two things in it. An original righteousness. Was not the Bible worth writing, were it but for that? How could we have known, how could we have guessed, apart from God, the good of which evil is the corruption? How could we have known, without God's telling, that this mixed thing which we are was not the created thing? that evil is not as much a part of our nature as good? that, in other words, we can be rid of our evil, and yet be?

Also the record is clear as to another point—that evil is an influence, not an inherence. I mean, that evil first came into man from without, not from within. Now, our Lord says, ‘from within come evil thoughts,’ of lust and rapine and wickedness—once it was not so. Again therefore we see that there is hope for us. We were made good. An alien, a usurper, came in afterwards, and made havoc of us. If there is any one to bind the strong man, we may yet be rid of him, and be free.

Such is the significance of the Fall as a fact. In this twofold revelation—which, I say again, we never could have invented—the revelation of an original righteousness, and the revelation of a derived corruption—lies the foundation of all hope, the foundation of Redemption itself.

Besides the fact, the Bible tells us the consequence, of this Fall.

It shows, in that brief, that disconsolate story, exactly how sin, once let in, acts and works. It is worth volumes of laborious argument—that one page of graphic example.

No one can be a sinner, and not hand on the sin.

The woman, led astray, must have a companion. Not out of malice—quite the contrary—out of love—what the fallen calls love—she draws in another.

It is not till the act is consummated—sin, as St James writes, finished—that any bitterness enters. Then the after-taste is very bitter. Arraignment, first by conscience, then by the Judge—then a paltry miserable self-excusing, a mere shifting of the blame—marvellous in its anticipation of the story of two hundred generations—then expulsion, disinheriting yet no disowning—then (turning one page) a murder, a brother's murder—is not all this a treatise, a Divine treatise, written in human language, true to human experience, upon Original Sin? Does it not all show us how evil infects—how it is in its very nature to spread from one to another—how it is not that we are punished because Adam fell—not that we are made responsible for an act done, six millenniums before we were born, by some one else—but that, as children born in a careless, godless, sinful home do catch an infection of sin and ungodliness—as a wicked man's family, even when he has been executed for his crimes, retains, as it were, the heirloom and heritage of his shame and of his sin—even so we, never knowing what it was to draw an entirely free breath, born into a world which had broken loose from its Maker, have in us, practically, a taint and a bias and a contagion which God offers to correct and counteract and cure in Jesus Christ, but which must

first be recognized as a fact, and brought to Him, as such, for His Divine and merciful help.

We have all acted over and over again that first sin which was not our own. We have all made ourselves parties to it. Whenever, in whatever way, we have preferred the creature to the Creator—have thought more of a pleasure, of a gain, of an honour, of a love, than of Him, our good and merciful Father who giveth, and who is more than, all things—we have sinned again that first, that model sin, which had in it all that mystery of death and ruin. We cannot complain. We have fallen, not once or twice—we ourselves. It may be, that God saw us all in Adam—saw that his trial, his defeat, his sin, was, in simple single truth, the story and the life of us all—and dealt with us, in mercy—yes, in mercy—as all included and comprehended in him our forefather and our head. Something of this kind seems to lurk in S. Paul's words, 'As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all sinned'—and again, 'By the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation'—and again, 'By one man's disobedience many (the many—the world of men) were made sinners.'

Enough. We are in the hands of perfect justice, of infinite love. 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do

right?' We are sinners—sinners in thought, in word, in act—sinners in the things done, sinners in the things left undone—sinners as much in the motive of the better as in the colour of our worse deeds. Let alone, we go astray, we do wrong, we corrupt others, we feed on ashes, we sit in the sackcloth of a gloomy, an impenitent remorse, we curse God and die. Life itself becomes a charnel-house of dead hopes and abortive efforts—'men follow the generations of their fathers, and never see light.'

But we are not let alone. If God treats us as fallen—if God deals with us as sinners—it is that He may be true with us, it is that He may be merciful. He who reveals sin reveals also salvation. They that are whole need not the Physician—Christ comes to call sinners—sinners see His beauty and can desire Him.

Brethren! kick not against the goad. Suffer God to teach you what you are. 'Count it not strange, as though some strange thing happened to you,' when you find yourself weak and irresolute and prone to sin. This is what God says of you. Bless Him, rather, for reading you aright, and still, still caring for you. See how He has adapted His treatment to our condition—our condition, as it would have been even if He had not spoken. O the mercy, the unspeakable mercy, the comfort too and the reality, of being

spoken to, and dealt with, and ministered to, as we are! If God had expected any good thing in us, how disheartening, how paralyzing, had been the revelation! If God had said, or seemed to say, Do thou this and then I will do that—bring effort, bring resolution, bring clean hands and a pure heart, and I will accept, I will overlook defects, I will crown with salvation—bring half, or bring one quarter, or bring one millionth part, and I will supplement, I will complete—how dreadful, because how mocking, had been the offer! But when God reveals Original Sin—when God says, ‘Thou art all vile, and yet I love thee—thou hast nothing, Christ is all—thou wilt fall back every moment, but I will sustain thee—thou art all sin, but Christ is made sin for thee—look to Him, look to me through Him, and thou shalt be saved—plunge whole into the open fountain, and thou shalt be clean, whiter than snow’—what strength, what comfort, is here! A whole sinner face to face with a whole Saviour—what truth! what wisdom! what love! A whole sinner—nothing expected of him—everything that he is, known, presupposed, laid account for—an entire Saviour, an altogether Sanctifier—a Father who knows all, and loves better—what would we? Is not this a complete salvation? how, how shall we escape, if we mutilate, if we disparage, if we neglect it?

V. S.

Q

No, Lord—we will not neglect it. We bless Thee for revealing sin—without the knowledge of it there is no salvation. We bless Thee for calling us by our name—if Thou hadst flattered us, we were lost.

We are, we know we are, that which Thou sayest of us. Yes—conceived in sin—shapen in wickedness—yes, it is true—not one word, not one letter, too strong. And then—‘though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as wool—though they be red like crimson, they shall be white as snow’—yes, Lord, Thou knowest us—and we hear the Father’s voice—and we run after Thee.

III.

SIN WORKING.

ROMANS VII. 24.

*O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from
the body of this death ?*

WE read last Sunday of that 'great and exceeding bitter cry' with which a deceived and supplanted brother bewailed the loss of his blessing. We could scarcely have expected an echo of that lamentation from an Apostle of the New Testament. The words of the text stand for ever on record, as an assurance of the essential unity of human nature in all times, and of the deep loving sympathy of Christ and His Apostles with those who are now slowly making their way, oftentimes (as Isaiah writes) 'hardly bestead and hungry,' through the wilderness of this world, towards the rest, the blessed rest, that 'remains for the people of God.'

It is difficult to say confidently how much of this cry comes from the personal heart of St Paul. Certainly peace and joy were no strangers to him. Certainly he felt himself in safe hands—and within a very few verses he will be found rejoicing in his conscious emancipation from the law of sin and death by the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Yet such is the mysterious blending of hope and fear, of sorrow and consolation, of death and life, in the Christian experience, that I would not venture to draw a hard and fast line between what St Paul writes as his own, and what St Paul writes as the experience, present or past, of another, or of the race. I love to contemplate St Paul as many men in one. I would see him, in that great heart of his, in that thrilling passionate sympathy which breathes in every page of his writings, actually living a hundred lives, each one as real as it is vivid, each one as true to fact as it is generous in feeling. And therefore I would read this strange, this mysterious, this dark chapter before us, as the history of states which he had passed through—and more than this, as the photograph of states which he was still passing through in a sense quite adequate to the utterance—to such an utterance, even, as that which we have made our text for this evening—‘O wretched man that I

am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?’

It seems to be required in order to the scantiest accomplishment of the work which we have undertaken, that something should now be said of the *working* of sin; of that strange disease—call it infection, call it inheritance, call it what you will, so long as you recognize the two points, essential alike to the truth of God and man, its originality and its non-originality—its original presence in the man, its not original presence in the race—which has made one part of God’s creation so unlike, so opposite, to what it must have been, when, on the evening of the sixth day, He looked upon it all, and pronounced it very good.

Now no man wishing to speak truly, and to speak impressively—that is, to hearts and consciences—on this part of the subject, can possibly turn aside from this 7th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. Whether it is the personal history of St Paul, or whether it is the ideal picture of a spiritual experience, or whether it is the comprehensive account of the passage of universal man through the stages of nature, law, and grace—it is, at all events, a description, by a master mind, of effects and influences which most nearly and most vitally concern us all. We may go

so far as to declare that no one can enter deeply into the study of sin without sitting at St Paul's feet to learn both the metaphysics and the ethics and still more the theology of the question as he here enunciates and developes each.

He has used in the 5th verse the startling expression, 'the motions (or passions) of sins, which were by the law.' Considering that the law spoken of was God's law, his readers might naturally ask some account of such a saying. In an earlier Epistle, written within the same year, the first to the Corinthians, he had said, without explanation, 'The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.' Here in the same tone he speaks of the law as concerned instrumentally in stirring or setting in motion the passions of our sins. It is time then that he should explain. He does so in this Chapter.

Brethren! our work here is practical. We meet here, not for amusement, not for argument, not for disquisition, not even (primarily) for information, but for edifying—which is, building, upon the one foundation than which none other can be laid, the temple of the spiritual life. God help us to keep this in mind, while endeavouring to draw, from this storehouse of truth, a few great principles, of momentous, of everlasting interest.

And, first, St Paul bids us to distinguish between the existence and the operation of sin.

He takes the case—whether his own, or another's, or of mankind, is a point of minor importance—the case of one to whom God's law has not yet 'come.' He may have in his view the man whom God created upright, and to whom the word, *Thou shalt not eat of a particular tree*, had not yet been spoken. He may have in his view that more practical case, of one, born indeed under law, but as yet unconscious of 'the plague of his own heart,' and not yet made to feel by bitter experience the pinch and bite of a positive Divine injunction. We can all conceive such a state. It is the state of many good dispositions, of many pure homes, of many neutral characters, into which appetite and passion have not yet carried the fire and sword of a discriminating trial. It was the case, more or less, of St Paul himself in the years of his Pharisee life—when, though he knew and studied, and even fought and persecuted for, the Law of God, he had not felt its sting inwardly as an accusing and condemning power.

I address, it is probable, some, this evening, who are still, to describe them roughly, in the unconscious, unawakened state. The law of God is a name to them. They have never felt it in its grasp and in its

gripe. They have never come into collision with it. Amiable, decorous, tractable, worshipping—what antagonism is there between them and God's law? This is perhaps the nearest approach now possible to the particular experience with which St Paul begins his description.

Yet in that heart—in that young condition—in that comparatively upright, innocent, light-hearted person—sin is. Quiescent, asleep, even 'dead'—St Paul grants even that possibility—yet (for he speaks of the fallen) not non-existent. Sin is, where man is. But sin may be torpid, dormant, lifeless. It is so, for many, till some rude shock—of circumstance, of accident, of desire, of surprising, startling, shocking lust—comes to waken and to reveal. Then it is discovered that sin, that lurking venomous viper, was coiled up inside us—only we knew it not. The idea is quite intelligible. Sin is the self-will enthroned. Now the self-will may be enthroned, is often enthroned, without any conscious antagonism to another will. It is quite conceivable that a man might really be ignorant of any opposition between his will and God's will, and yet such an opposition might exist, and in due time might come to the light of day.

St Paul describes that discovery of the contrariety between the will of the man and the will of God

as made by 'the commandment coming' to him. He takes the case of that one particular commandment of the Decalogue which applies to the thoughts. The 10th commandment is a sort of specimen, a shadow cast before, of the great interpretation of law made centuries later on the Mount of the Beatitudes. It applies to the thoughts. 'Thou shalt not covet.' In the same degree its scope is wider than that of the rest. St Paul takes it as his example of the revelation, the revelation of hearts, made by God's law. He says that it made him know what sin was. Not to kill—not to commit adultery—not to steal—a man might not be tempted to these acts. But not to desire, not to lust—'who can say, I have made my heart clean?'

This revelation, he says, sets sin in motion. It is there—the self-will is there—and on its throne. The will of God, expressed in law, stirs it into operation. Its reign is disputed. Its supremacy is invaded. Sin revives. The self-will must assert itself. No reflection is here upon the holiness of the law—rather a tribute to it. The self-will, existing, enthroned, before, now arouses and exerts itself. 'When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.'

Brethren! it is a true picture—true to life—true to your experience. Yes, it is not in the broad general

lines of honour and honesty, of decorum and decency, that the antagonism between God and fallen man shows itself. It is when you desire some particular thing, which God has not given—when you would have, must have, some special indulgence, some immunity and impunity of sinning, not in the general but in the particular—and God says, ‘No’—it is then, it is thus, that ‘the commandment comes’ to you. It is then, and it is thus, that sin, dormant, lifeless before, springs into activity. It seizes, St Paul says, the very prohibition as its starting-point. It says, first, as in the original temptation, ‘Yea, hath God said?’ It says secondly, ‘God doth know that this forbidden thing is your good.’ It says thirdly, ‘The Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it’—and the deed is done. The commandment came—sin revived—and I died.

And was God, St Paul asks, to blame for this? Was the law sin? Nay, it was the very holiness of God’s law which was made prominent by the whole transaction.

For what is it? I myself disapprove my own act. There is that within me, which registers a condemning sentence against the thing done. If I, I myself, whole and entire, went along with my act, there might be an appeal. But, if I hate the very thing I do, I myself consent to the law that it is good.

O terrible self-condemnation ! From it there can be no appeal. Does not that inward sentence show conclusively that I am in evil case ? that I am not my own ? that there is, inside me, some alien, some usurper, some enemy, using me against myself, turning my own faculties, my own members, to my ruin, and reducing me to the desperate condition of a house, of a kingdom, divided against itself ? Not in the way of excuse—God forbid—rather in the tone of uttermost grief and consternation—does St Paul urge this fact of the lost unity, of the divided personality, of the recalcitrant judgment and the overmastered will.

Strange is it—when we think of it—that any should seek comfort in their own shame—that any should turn St Paul's dirge into a pæan—should say, in a tone most discordant with his, 'It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me—and therefore I am not responsible—therefore God must forgive.' Forgive, and leave in our ruin ? forgive, and leave in our shame and our self-contempt ? What honest, what sane man, could even accept, could even tolerate, such a Gospel ? Rather would he say, If sin, then hell—they are but two names for one thing—if you cannot find for me cleansing, then talk not of pardon—if you cannot emancipate, bind on my chain and let me die.

St Paul goes yet further. There is in us, he says, not only a disapproval of our own wicked act—there is even a ready, an earnest approval of the holiness of God's law. 'The inward man,' the 'mind,' 'delights in the law of God'—but there is another law, waging war, in the very members and organs of the fleshly body, against this 'law of the mind,' and 'bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.' 'With the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.' 'O wretched man that I am'—thus divided and distracted between two conflicting impulses—'who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' Who shall rescue me out of this carcase of flesh and blood, which, while it encases me, must be a fighting-ground—insomuch that even the Apostle of grace and redemption has to 'keep under his body and bring it into subjection, lest that by some means, after preaching to others, he himself should be a castaway?' The cry 'even of the regenerate' must be for resurrection, for the transfiguration and spiritualization of the body.

There are times—they come, I suppose, to all of us—when the cry of the text becomes an agony and a death-struggle. St Paul felt his body a snare to him. Much as he lived in heaven, it was by an effort

and a self-crucifixion. We naturally suppose that in his case it was chiefly the enfeeblement that was the stumblingblock. We picture him to ourselves as a man of feeble strength and many infirmities—consumed by a fire of zeal which burned up the very energies of the frame. I doubt whether even this will fully account for his language, here and elsewhere, concerning his body. Men of intense sympathy, of glowing affection, have trials all their own in consequence of it. St Paul's mistrust, St Paul's dread, St Paul's abhorrence, I had almost said, of the body, points possibly to trials and temptations very definite, and in which he may have been more one with us than we imagine. His desire for resurrection was a passion. 'If by any means I may attain to the resurrection of the dead.' To anticipate and antedate the resurrection—to live now as having died and risen—is St Paul's mystery of Christian living. We love him for the words, and for the thoughts which breathe in them. We feel as he felt—might we but aspire like him and after him! It is easy to talk of Christian progress. It is easy to paint the advance, and the progress, and the saintly life, and the foretaste of heaven. But, after all, where is the best of us, really, on his way? Is there one in all this audience, who is always, who is permanently, much in advance of

this cry, 'O wretched man that I am?' When any, thing new comes to us, any thing out of the common round, the beaten path, of experience—when some very tempting lure or guile plies us—when some sudden wind of temptation blows, and catches us unawares, and we have no time to make solemn preparation, and the answer must be on the instant, and all looks innocent and beautiful, and there is but the indescribable indefinable something which warns us of a danger unseen and invisible—which of us is not, I will not say, 'a learner yet,' but a sinner and a backslider and a 'wretched man' still—crying out, happy if he cries out, 'Who shall deliver me'—or can add, with the feeblest remotest peradventure, 'I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord?'

We make, in one sense too slight, in another sense too marked, a line between the saint and the sinner. The 'saint' is but the sinner indwelt of God—a vast, an incalculable difference, I know—yet still a difference which must be daily fought for, daily kept with tears of sweat and blood, or it will be lost again sooner than it was won.

There are seasons in every man's life, when he is made to feel these things which it is always proper to say. Seasons when the sense of weakness intensifies itself into an anguish—into a horror (like Abraham's)

of great darkness. At such seasons we can bless St Paul, and St Paul's Master, even more for his 'O wretched man that I am!' than for his 'I have finished my course, henceforth there is laid up for me the crown.' Take the comfort—but O take with it the strength! St Paul did not yield because he was tempted. St Paul did not part with his joy because he was 'wretched.' There is a strength for us—it is perfected in weakness: a strength sufficient for us—yet none to spare. The working of sin is very subtle, very busy, very powerful: one working, one only, is mightier. It is the operation of God who raised up Jesus, and who works the same work—who shall say that it is not even more marvellous still?—in the souls of them that believe. He keeps from falling—He raises from falling—every day. Part not, any of us, with this good and dear Master. Who does not want Him? Who shall replace Him? Who shall comfort when He withdraws Himself? Who shall outshine Him in His clear, His bright, His beautiful light? Shall earthly lust, shall filthy lucre, shall sweetest fondest dearest affection? Shall any created thing counterfeit that love of the Creator, which is ready for each one of us, and never upbraids?

Brethren! very feebly, very inadequately, has the

text been spoken upon: there is the more room for thought—there is the more room for the Spirit of grace and of supplication. Bend low, bend very low; this night, before the throne of infinite power, that He who ‘giveth more grace,’ in proportion to our want and in proportion to our longing, may ‘supply all our need according to His riches in glory’ through His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

IV.

THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN.

ROMANS VII. II.

Sin deceived, and slew me.

How vague to most minds, how shadowy, how remote at all events, is the thing called Sin. Some great, startling, almost impossible crime—some act of theft, or adultery, or murder, to which we cannot even conceive ourselves even tempted—that is Sin, to the unawakened. Even if reflection, if metaphysics, if theology, should give us a clearer and truer insight, still conscience keeps it at a distance. The intellect may apprehend, the reason may analyze, the pen or the voice may discuss and define it, and yet the soul, which is the man, may utterly ignore and discard it as a fact, as a power, as a presence, as a responsibility. In general, when the conviction of sin comes, it comes

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as a revolutionist, as an incendiary, within. The man, who ate and slept and jested while he only called himself in church and among the multitude a miserable sinner, can now neither rest nor work nor worship, when the 'hearing' is exchanged for the 'seeing,' and the dead corpse of Sin has started, for him, into a ghost and an apparition.

We are endeavouring, in these Services, to give some meaning to the word Sin—to quicken and animate it into a reality, that we may not trifle on, to the end, with a disease which, if the Word of God be true, is in all of us, and is at once insidious and infectious and mortal.

We owe to St Paul, and to this passage of his Epistle to the Romans particularly, much instruction in what has been called 'the Christian doctrine of Sin.' This especially—that he traces sin to a source high above act, above intention, above motive; to a point prior to law itself; to a time when there was not only no transgression of law, but no law to transgress. He will admit anything you please as to its inactivity, its torpor, even its un vitality—he is willing even to speak of it as (at that period) lifeless, 'dead.' But he, the Apostle of grace and the Gospel, feels that nothing is done, the first step cannot be taken, towards a free salvation, until the seat of sin in the

heart, its secret place as a thing embedded in fallen nature, is understood and realized. Then first will it be seen why a Saviour was necessary—not the Saviour of a few, exceptionally vile and criminal, but the Saviour of the race, the undoer and reverser of an original Fall, through whom, in whom, they who died in Adam may live again and be recreated into righteousness.

Sin therefore, with St Paul, is that alienation from God, that estrangement from the true rest and home of the being, that enthronement (as we have called it) of the self-will as the usurping sovereign of God's kingdom the man, which may exist, may rule at once absolutely and unconsciously, where there has not yet been one overt act of rebellion, or even where there is not yet so much as an idea of God's will having expressed itself in a revelation of duty.

It is a bold, but also a powerful and a convincing representation. It explains us to ourselves, it explains God in Christ to us, as nothing else can. It shows the original equality of all men in this matter. It shows the futility of mere piecing and patching in the state of the soul. It accounts for the treatment of all—even of moral, useful, benevolent people—as sinners 'not hereby justified.' If it be true that there is something in me—St Paul compares it to an inmate or

resident in the chambers of my soul's home—a tenant or lodger once introduced, and now managing and tyrannizing and refusing to be ejected—a director of the affairs of my life, not allowing me even a sight of my accounts or an explanation of my own proceedings—if all this be true—and it wonderfully tallies with my experience, of evil done, and good left undone, while the 'I myself' of the man looked on and purposed and willed differently—then I see at once that my cure, my restoration, must go very deep if it is to be availing—I want a justification, I want a sanctification, I want a washing with out-poured blood, and I want a renewing as by a refining fire, if I am ever to be what I know that I must be if I would see God, if I am ever to reach the saints' rest, or to behold in His awful purity the God in whose sight the heavens are not clear.

Now the particular thought suggested to us this evening is

The Deceitfulness of Sin.

This usurping inmate, this rebel self-will, this power inside me, this law self-enforcing, which has taken possession, and with which neither conscience nor reason nor resolution nor remorse can successfully cope, finds itself confronted with a Divine command—a 'Do' or 'Do not,' which, it is well aware, comes

from above, from the rightful Lord and King of the creature. How shall it deal with it? How shall this mysterious power, this practical tyrant of the being, this 'strong one fully armed, keeping its palace,' comport itself in the face of an edict which the subject (because created) thing knows and feels to be holy and just and good? That is St Paul's question. And surely, if it had not the interest of a soul's battle for life and death, it would be a study of incomparable excitement to a merely intellectual looker-on. St Paul says that Sin seizes the 'commandment,' thus 'coming' to the man, as its 'occasion' or 'starting-point' for his deception and ruin. 'Sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.' Sin sees that its hour is come. If its throne is to be kept standing, it must be kept by putting a cheat upon the poor subject abject thing which it has made its slave. So then it is the first temptation acted again and again along these calamitous and blood-stained ages. 'The serpent deceived Eve by his subtilty.' She herself said, at the bar of God's trial, hoping it might excuse her, 'The serpent deceived me, and I did eat.' So has it been ever, so is it still, in all of us, day by day. Sin first deceives, and then slays.

We will try to realize this statement to our own

hearts by reflection upon our own and others' experience in the thing spoken of. 'The deceitfulness of sin.'

No sin was ever done upon this earth—no, nor could be—but under a deception. If a man saw at the moment of temptation the ugliness, the repulsiveness, the hideousness, of the sin as it will look when it has been done—as it will look on a deathbed—as it will look in the judgment—as it will look when, flesh and sense being laid aside, it shall remain as a memory, as a tormentor, in the everlasting world—could he do it? But Sin, the wily indwelling foe, deceives me, and so slays.

Look at some of these illusions. And, ere we do so, let me again beg that we will not throw an unreality over every thing by imagining that we are speaking of great crimes. Of course the subject is vividly terribly real with regard to these. We see the truth of it in them. But we speak no less of those common daily small transgressions which make for most of us the real subjects of our trial. Imagine yourself tempted to a greedy, to a selfish, to a self-indulgent act—if it be but in matters of eating, drinking, or amusement. Imagine yourself tempted to an angry, passionate, undutiful word—if it be but as you sit in the house and a parent or an elder brother

bids or rebukes. Imagine yourself tempted to brood over some jealous, vindictive, malicious thought—some recollection of injury, supposed or real—some instance in which you have been passed by in favour of another, in the matter of a prize, a trust, or an appointment—and so to cherish it in your bosom that it shall be nursed into a settled feeling of enmity. Imagine yourself—alas, the commonest thing of all—tempted to some impure train of thought, suggested by memory or reading or mere roving fancy—and you must either give way to it, or do battle. I might even say, if it were needful to illustrate further, Imagine yourself tempted to nothing more than just one of those small postponements and procrastinations of duty to which we all are so prone, and which yet do signify very much to the fidelity and efficiency and conscientiousness of our lives. These are the things of which we speak tonight when we would show how Sin deceives first, and then slays.

Now you will find, in all such cases, as in cases of more open and flagrant transgression, that there is a regular process going on within you, of colouring and misrepresenting and distorting—of hoodwinking and cajoling and throwing dust in the mind's eyes—which persons of long self-observation recognize at once as marked by an evident design and purpose, as well as

by a strong likeness of feature and method, however various the special topic of debate.

There are three deceptions always tried by the indwelling Sin on these occasions.

(1) The first concerns the character of the act. And I need not remind you that there are, in these things, mental acts, and verbal acts, as well as manual. Our Lord taught us that a look may be an action. Wherever there is a right and a wrong, wherever (in other terms) there is an exercise of will, if it be momentary, there is an application of the saying before us.

Sin's first deception is as to the character of the act. We never sin but under an impression of the desirableness of the object. If it be but an angry word, we vent it because it is pleasant to do so. To retaliate evil, to avenge a supposed wrong, to inflict pain upon one who has slighted or offended, this too is sweet. So sin paints it—and has time to do so, though there be but a moment between the provocation and the retaliation. There is always time for sin to deceive. You can feel the breath, you can almost hear the whisper—if you watch, if you listen—which bids you utter that unadvised word, that speedy retort, that proud defiance. And yet, the next moment, if you are not very hard, you are sorry. You see that you

were deceived. You are made to feel that Sin is a liar. Yet, the next time, the lie is as prevalent as ever.

I have taken the least obvious case, because it alone needs illustration. The temptation to postpone an irksome duty—the temptation to indulge a bodily appetite—the temptation to give the rein to a loose imagination—here the deception is evident. In each case, we are made to think the wrong thing desirable—even though we awake, an hour afterwards, to find the double annoyance of the same duty done too late, or the wretched stinging remorse of some actual, some unintended wickedness into which the sinful imagination hurried us, and which showed us the horrible servitude in which we lie under our indwelling task-master.

Whatever be the form of the illusion, it is always, in substance, that under which the first sin was committed—‘The woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise.’

(2) The second deception is as to the excuse for the act.

No one sins, no, not even the worst of sins, without a self-exculpation. It was so in the first transgression. It is so in every transgression. The woman pleaded the beguilement. The man pleaded the companionship.

Only the tempter could plead nothing. He sinned, because he had cast in his lot openly with sinning, and evil was now his good.

Certainly we all excuse ourselves now. One pleads the force of circumstances—another, the influence of disposition and temperament—another, the very badness of his own nature, half hoping that the general confession may atone for the particular offence. Sin deceives ere it slays—and it loudly urges, in the ear of the wavering, the strength of the temptation, the weakness of the tempted, the hostages already given to transgression, the hopelessness of the unequal struggle, and the ever persuasive ‘God doth know’ alike the excellence of your intentions, and the combination of those influences to which you late and reluctantly make surrender.

(3) The third deception is as to the consequences of the act.

No one sins, no, not even after repeated warnings, with a full expectation of punishment. The gambling spirit which is in all of us speculates upon impunity. And here I speak not only of crimes but of sins—and, if of crimes also, yet in their aspect of sins—in their aspect, in other words, not to man, but to God. God, with reference to His own jurisdiction, has declared, ‘Be sure your sin will find you out.’ Find

you out in trouble, mental if not outward—eventual if not immediate. Find you out in conscience—find you out in the health of the soul, and in the stamina of the moral nature. Find you out, in undermining strength and aggravating weakness—in multiplying tendencies to, and excuses for, sinning—in making it more difficult for you to resist afterwards, and more probable therefore that yours will be a downward course, carrying you (like the ‘guests’ in the Book of Proverbs) into the very ‘depths of hell.’ Find you out, in the gradual darkening of that inward lamp which is the life’s lighthouse—in the gradual advance towards that state of uttermost bewilderment in which the sinner finally loses himself upon the dark mountains of a judicial abandonment to his own heart’s lusts.

Such thoughts as these Sin, by one pass of the mesmeric hand, lulls absolutely to sleep in the moment of sinning. ‘Tush, there shall no harm happen unto me. Tush, Thou God carest not for it. It is not by one act that the life shapes itself—it is not for one negligence that God will condemn. We cannot always be watching. Flesh and blood cannot bear the strain of so perpetual, so feverish a looking for of judgment. If for every smallest transgression God shall be thus extreme to make inquisition, then is the Gospel void—then Christ is dead in vain!’

Sin deceives—and slays.

The office of sin is not ended when it has deluded us into sinning. It has an office afterwards toward the sinner.

A fall need not be a hardening. There have been falls which were even softening. This has been where the Holy Spirit of God took up the torn and bleeding spirit, poured in the oil and wine of grace, and wrought betimes the effectual work of a true and heart-deep repentance.

If the sinner is left with his sin, or taken back for healing into the hospital of a sin-possessed heart, then it is not so.

How fertile is sin then in its consolations. How slightly does it heal a soul's hurt. How full are its storehouses of palliatives and cordials. How incapable is it of even seeing the real wound—which is, the hatefulness of sin itself in the sight of God, and the despite done by it to the Cross and to the Spirit.

Soon there settles down upon the defiled and un-cleansed soul that darkness which is the expeller and successor of the light—of which our Lord Himself spoke in the terrific half-hinted sentence, 'If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness.'

Brethren! the applications of our subject are many—but the lesson is one.

Be thorough in your treatment of your own sin. Be not satisfied with watching the doors of the life to see what comes out. It is something—but it is very little—to mark and note in a book the several words and acts by which you have disobeyed and dishonoured your soul's Lord. There are many who count this every thing, and will pronounce you sincere and in earnest according as you make exact confession of the separate doings and sayings of your past sinful life. We do not discourage, and we would not disparage, any efforts after reality. But we do feel that there might be all this well and carefully done, and yet, if St Paul be true, we might but have been skirmishing in the outskirts of the real battle. There is a thing inside us, which never crosses the threshold and never shows itself at the window, and which yet is the real foe and holds the very key of the position. This thing, which St Paul calls Sin, sets the members in motion on their several tasks and errands of sinning, and yet is itself distinct and separate from them all, and might possibly be living and reigning, without radical change, if the members were all bound up or all paralyzed. Our Lord seems to point to this, when He says, 'From within, out of the

heart of man, proceed evil thoughts'—as though there were a root and a source not necessarily reached or touched when you had dealt ever so vigorously with the phenomena.

Brethren! we must get at the heart, if we would ever get at the life. Out of it are life's issues. There is a poor feeble dabbling and dawdling with things done and said, and with things left undone and unsaid, which is not decisive, nor even tending to the decision, of the mighty and terrible war with Sin. 'These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.' Get the throne vacated and refilled—take God Himself, God in Christ, for your Lord and your King—give your heart to Him first, by an act of solemn transfer and dedication of yourself within—and then the deeds will be holy also. 'They gave *themselves*,' it is written, 'first to the Lord'—then the motive became right, and the aim and the direction of every thing—and then the several separate parts and pieces of the life became capable and receptive of the consecration.

This, brethren, is our Lenten counsel—different, it may be, in some points, from that of others—not hoping to reach the heart through the actions, but the actions through the heart. We know, we feel, the peril of a possible self-deception here as there—in the

one as in the other. Then let our constant prayer be that which carries us straight to the Fountain of truth and purity—‘Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart: prove me, and examine my thoughts. Look well if there be any way of wickedness in me: and lead me in the way everlasting.’

V.

THE PERTINACITY OF SIN.

HEBREWS XII. 4.

Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

IT is assumed that there is resistance. It is assumed that a struggle with sin is in progress. Only that struggle has not reached its end. Only that resistance is not yet perfected. And why not? It has not yet been 'unto blood.' It has not yet cost the man his life. And till then he has nothing to complain and nothing to boast of. He follows One who did resist unto blood—One whose struggle with Sin was not only severe, but mortal—whose resistance was not only a testimony, but a martyrdom—not only a life, but a death—yea, the death of the Creator—yea, the death of the Cross.

The Reign of Sin is our subject this Lent. We have already said something in these Lectures upon the nature of Sin—something upon what is known as Original Sin—something upon the working of Sin—something upon the deceitfulness of Sin; and we reserve for two remaining occasions (the latter of which will fall on the Wednesday of Passion Week) the two solemn topics, of the Sin against the Holy Ghost, and Sin re-crucifying the Son of God. This evening our thought is to be, The obstinacy, the stubbornness, the pertinacity of Sin. And the text seems to set Sin in that light very forcibly, very vividly, before us, when it remonstrates with us for thinking anything of a warfare with Sin which does not cost us our lives, or for growing weary and faint-hearted in a resistance which, by the very fact of its continuance, is proved to be ‘not yet unto blood.’

It has been the dream of some theologies, that a lively apprehension of the great doctrine of the Forgiveness of Sins—a clear and profound sense of the blessed mystery of Christ’s Atonement—ought to give not only permanent peace, but instant sanctification. I call it a dream, because it appears to me to rest neither upon Scripture nor upon experience. A harsher name would not be uncharitable—for indeed it has caused much misery to ‘hearts which

God has not made sad,' and much self-deception to those less scrupulous, less vigilant natures which can accept a self-confident doctrine in the face of a self-evident fact.

Separate texts may be quoted from St Paul and St John apparently confirmatory of these dangerous theories. But no Apostle has left himself without witness as to the perilousness of so reading him. If St John says of the Christian man, 'He cannot sin, because he is born of God,' no Apostle is more earnest, on the other hand, in his repudiation of the fancy of a realized sinlessness—none more strong in his assertion of the falsehood, of the impiety, of such an imagination—of the self-delusion involved in its admission, of its utter and direct contrariety to the whole tone and tenor of Divine Revelation. 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.' 'If we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar, and His word is not in us.' 'These things write I unto you, that ye sin not; and if any man sin' (as though he had said, 'And there is no man that sinneth not'), 'we have an Advocate with the Father—and He is Himself (also) the Propitiation for our sins.'

But the matter is too grave for controversy. Let us kneel, in heart and soul, while we ponder it. Let

us not lose this opportunity of edification. Bring it home. Am I, let each one ask himself, resisting at all—striving at all against sin? Is not, perhaps, the whole idea new to me—and the possibility of ‘resisting unto blood’ absolutely chimerical and grotesque to me? Once again let us lay the foundation. What is Sin? Where is Sin? In the act, or in the heart? If we can all answer, In the heart—for ‘out of it are the issues of life’—let us go on to enquire, *Where* in the heart—and what *is* it—Sin itself? Are we aware that we have a will, and that that will is naturally a self-will—a will not in harmony with, and not in subjection to, the will of God—an inclination, in other words, to ask, What is pleasant? not, What is right? as each successive possibility, of doing or not doing, comes separately before me for determination?

Now this self-will, this independence of God, this living by myself and for myself and not with God and for God, being the root of the bitter and noxious plant, Sin, we see at once that its eradication, not the plucking off of a few or a multitude of its leaves and fibres, is the object of life in this aspect. We see at once that a man may be decorous and moral and benevolent, and yet have done nothing towards this radical cure of the soul. Such a man is even more likely to miss the mark of thorough salvation, than

one whose stained and spotted life must catch his own eye and alarm his own conscience. Both alike may be living without an idea of a struggle, a warfare, with a foe inside them. Multitudes of living dying men never strike one blow in this war. They take life as it is—yield, with more or less pretence of reluctance, to the suggestions (whatever they be for them) of the usurping power within—and if they adopt, which is quite possible in either case, a little correct doctrine, about a Fall and a Redemption, they may contrive really to keep conscience asleep, till they ‘follow the generation of their fathers, having never seen light.’

But when the candle of the Lord, which is the word of God’s truth, really enters into the heart, bringing conviction, bringing conversion, bringing repentance and faith with it—when the man, long tied and bound unawares by the chain of Sin, begins to move and shake himself, under the impulse of an irresistible call—when he finds himself the slave of evil, so that, though the will may be present, the power to do is wanting—then begins warfare. A man cannot believe, before the trial, that there can be any real difficulty in changing his manner of life at his pleasure. But there is. There is something within me—deep within me—separate, yet at home—which refuses the mandate of my purpose, dishonours the

cheque drawn upon it by my will, sometimes openly defiant, more often secretly disaffected, in either case bringing to nought the intended good and carrying into effect the undesigned, the even hated evil.

Now the first idea of the awakening sleeper is that he shall readily change all this by taking Christ for his Master and calling in the promised help of the Holy Spirit. If salvation means anything, it must mean deliverance. We cannot cheat ourselves with the hope of pardon without grace, of conversion without a change. To be saved in our sins is a contradiction (conscience says) in terms. Therefore the promise of the Spirit is as dear to the soul, as absolute a necessity to the soul, as the promise of forgiveness. On this twofold rock we build—and the first expectation is that honest earnest prayer for victory will ensure that victory on the instant. Is it not written, Ask, and ye shall have? What room, then, for conflict, except it be that conflict, that wrestling, which St Paul writes of, and which our Lord Himself exemplified, in the very act itself of praying?

Brethren! we would not daunt one hope, one effort, one struggle, in that direction which is eternal life. The promise is there, and the promise is sure. Only understand it. The promise is for the fighting man, for the resisting, for the striving.

And the promise were no promise otherwise. The act of struggling is so noble that, could it be dispensed with, it would not. The soldier spirit is in all of us who are men. And when that spirit is roused, not by anger, not by passion, not even by honour, not even by patriotism, but by the desire to be like and to be with God ; when, in other words, that warfare is not with flesh and blood, but with fiends of malice and lust and ungodliness within ; when the prize of victory is not rank, not power, not a throne, but the power to do the will of God—the power to be (in God's sense) a king—over things present and things to come, over life and death, over sin and hell ; then indeed there is a nobleness and there is a greatness in fighting, which there could not be in mere easy success, in the mere dreaming myself into glory—we may thank God then that He has not put out our enemies before us all at once but (even as it is written) by 'little and little.' Yes, the very pertinacity of Sin becomes the victory and the glory and the Christianity of the Christian.

Let us, humbly, sorrowfully—for it is a mingled topic of tears and praises—look a little into this Pertinacity of Sin.

The context contains that word which has suggested the well-known phrase, the besetting sin.

Like many phrases borrowed from Holy Scripture, it is inaccurate. 'The sin which doth so easily beset us' is not one sin but all sin. That Sin, of which we have so much spoken in these Sermons—that inner, inmost, concentrated, almost personified Sin, which is the inmate of all of us since the Fall—is here compared to an entangling garment, or perhaps a surrounding crowd, which impedes and interrupts the free course and movement of the Christian runner. Common use has made the besetting sin the one particular kind and sort of sin which has special power over the individual. Thus we speak of vanity as the besetting sin of one man, temper of another, passion, in some of its countless forms, of another. And in this, if there is inaccuracy, there is also (as often happens) practical profiting. We do fight, each one, in a separate field in some sense, even though the arch-enemy be common to all. It is no doubt in one spot or corner of the great battle-field that the chief encounter of each one separately lies. There is at this time in the heart of each one who listens some particular tendency towards evil—it may be revenge, it may be desire, it may be idolatry, it may be some definite destructive lust—which is the question of life and death at present for him. And one chief example of the pertinacity of Sin is to be

found in this tendency. It has been said by men of experience in the Christian life that our besetting sin, whatever it be, will be such till our death. Advancing age will but vary the object—it will not much change the tendency. It is a sorrowful thought—full of warning. ‘What I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch.’ We should have hoped that, the battle once fought out with one embodiment of the evil, there would have been peace and rest afterwards. It is not so. If we could see, as only God sees, the map of a whole life, we should doubtless perceive how the turning-points and stopping-places had been all of one colour all along. We should have seen a unity in the chief temptations as much as in the main results of the history. We should perceive how Sin avails itself of the past to shape the present—how it treats the man as a weak creature of which it knows the secret and has the key. The besetting sin is the besetting sin all through, even to the end.

And how will the besetting sin, if unconquered, reappear as the tormentor in death and beyond death! Yes, brethren, fight it out now—whatever it may cost you—with the sin which most easily besets. Victory lies not in regrets or in resolutions—still less in general, vague, meaningless ‘beatings of the air’ against imagined hosts and hordes of evil—victory

lies in those little separate daily self-denials and self-mortifyings and self-crucifixions in detail, which make no show and no pretence and no history, but in which God and the holy Angels see the soul battling and conquering for its crown.

But the Pertinacity of Sin is seen scarcely less in the department of what we may call sins of substitution. There is a point at which Sin itself confesses itself vanquished. Such is oftentimes the transition-point from one age of human life to another. The sins of the child have no attraction for the young man, nor the sins of the boy for the man of full strength and strong ambition. The indwelling tyrant knows how to vary accordingly the form and mode of attack. Such is oftentimes the transition-point not from one age to another, but from one mood and one phase of the character to another. There is a victory, clear and decisive, over a particular temptation—won, not always by the Cross or by the Spirit, but sometimes by pride or by self-interest or even by principle—which yet is not a victory over Sin in the capital and the citadel, but rather over one of the outposts and advanced guards of Sin, absolutely indecisive as to the great issue, and rather challenging a new movement on the part of the enemy who would not lose heart nor lose possession. We have seen in

this manner lust replaced by ambition, or carelessness and unbelief succeeded by self-righteousness and cruelty. If we but showed one tenth part of the zeal to save, which the devil shows to ruin! It seems as though there were even a waste of malice in his plotting and in his manœuvring. Less would suffice. But he values that which we hold cheap—the possession of souls for which Christ died in vain.

Yet, although we speak thus seriously of special sins—feeling that the man who is tied and bound by one sin is as though he were the victim and the sport of all—we must not lay the whole weight of argument and illustration, as touching the Pertinacity of Sin, upon such points as those which have been already dwelt upon. There is a sin, which bears no name, and is not found in the books, and is characterized by no striking features, and consequently has no special rules of treatment by art and man's device—which yet slays its ten thousands where others slay their thousands. We speak now of that negative, featureless, colourless thing, which is a mere languor and apathy and lethargy of the soul towards God and Christ and things above—the growth of indolence and negligence and letting alone, taken no account of, it may be, by friends or pastors or by the soul itself, until it ends in that sleep from which there is no awakening. There is a

pertinacity, here also, in the work of Sin, which alone could account for a result so grave and so mysterious. But in this matter we are deeply, solemnly responsible, each man for himself—inasmuch as here least of all is there any compulsion of sinning, and he who will not break the chain of careless godless living has but himself, as the days flit by, to charge with it.

Brethren! the work of resistance is not easy. To resist unto blood is no light thing for any man. It is a martyrdom, without the glory. These resistances are wrought out in the privacy of a home, in the obscure secrecy of the life's life. It is a struggle in which there is more of weariness and painfulness and disappointment than of exciting encounter or brilliant victory. You will seldom see a soldier of the Cross elated or even encouraged. He sees too clearly the vastness of the field and the disproportion of the numbers to derive satisfaction from partial advantages or small successes. In himself he feels that nothing is done, that he is what he was, and almost where he was, last year, or when he first took the oath of service. If he looks back for a moment, he has slipped back. If he congratulates himself on a step gained, it is lost again. If he ever dares to say, 'Now the way is clear, now I may rest and be thankful,' he finds himself already beset, already encountered,

and must feel for his one weapon which is All-Prayer. There is nothing for him, but the counsel of this context—‘Looking unto Jesus.’ Looking to the example of His patience, in fighting bravely and constantly, as one of us, all along His difficult and trying earthly way. Looking to the example of His endurance, not only of trial and temptation, but of shame and anguish and of the cross itself, that He might go before us in all things, leaving us the foot-prints of His love and of His devotion. Looking to Him, above all, as now enthroned above—ready to listen, strong to save—yea, to make us more than conquerors through Him who loved us. We must not expect that which He found not, freedom from conflict, pain, or anguish below—let us only expect that which He, for His merits’ sake, will assure to us—a resolute will to follow His steps—a heart firmly set on things above—and an earnest purpose to live by the rule, ‘If we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him—If we suffer, we shall also reign.’

VI.

THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST.

I JOHN V. 16.

There is a sin unto death.

IT ought to make life a serious thing—it ought to make living an anxious responsibility—to know that, not once or twice, but six or seven times in the Bible, hints are dropped—mysterious, but not ambiguous hints—as to an unpardonable, a fatal, a desperate sin. ‘There is a sin unto death.’

It is easy, I know, to gloss over or to turn aside from these terrible words—to say, with many, I do not understand—or to say, with a few, I do not believe them. Still they are there—side by side with other and opposite words, which are our star, our sun, in this voyage, in this pilgrimage, which we call life—and it seems but reasonable that we should ponder

them, that we should have them in view, that we should be able to say what they mean, why they were written, what their lesson is, if not their doctrine.

We have, altogether, six chief passages of the New Testament which speak of a sin not having forgiveness. Each of the first three Gospels has a passage on the unpardonable sin. St John, who has it not in his Gospel, has it here in his Epistle. Another inspired writer, whose name we cannot give with certainty, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, has two solemn paragraphs bearing on the same subject. With varieties of detail, so great as to make some declare that the topics are different, they agree in this—in the general idea of a sin unto death—a sin which hath never forgiveness.

There is, however, one great difference, which divides the six statements into two groups—of two, and four.

In St Matthew and St Mark the warning voice of this revelation speaks to enemies: in St Luke, in the Hebrews, and in St John, its address is to Christians. St Luke is, if I might so express myself, the bridge between the two groups. Were it not for him, we might have doubted whether the two had anything in common; whether the 'blasphemy against the Holy Ghost' had any connexion with the 'sin

unto death.' But St Luke records the utterance to the disciples of that same dread sentence about the Holy Ghost which St Matthew and St Mark give as addressed to the blaspheming Pharisees—showing conclusively that Christians are not out of reach of that danger which in open enemies is blasphemy, and in false friends is a 'doing despite.'

We will take the two in their order.

Unable to gainsay the fact of Christ's miracles the Pharisees invented the explanation that they were wrought by the help of the evil one. 'He casteth out devils through Beelzebub.' Our Lord exposed the folly of this cavil. As well might a house or a kingdom suicidally seek its own ruin, as the devil assist Christ in pulling down his empire. But there was a spirit shown in the suggestion, which either was, or was in the way to be, past the reach of grace. Those who can deliberately call good evil, ascribe God's work to the devil, find in the holy and Divine Saviour a mere tool and accomplice of Satan, and so wilfully misread His evidences as to rob them of all possibility of weight or conviction, have indeed upon them the mark of a reprobate mind—are self-condemned of a hardness and blindness and distortion of conscience such as belong only to lost souls which have erased and sinned away that true humanity

which is the relic, and the record too, of an original creation after God's image. 'He that shall (thus) blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation—because they said, He hath an unclean spirit.'

Even there, in that extreme instance, our Lord distinguishes between 'speaking against the Son of Man' and 'blaspheming against the Holy Ghost.' We could almost understand Him as leaving a loophole of hope for those His bitterest calumniators. As though He would say, Dreadful as it is to malign the Son of Man, in His day of humility and self-sacrifice, there is a sin yet behind, which waits for its possibility until Pentecost. Not yet has the Holy Ghost descended in all His sevenfold gifts of grace upon the Church which must first be bought with blood. The unpardonable sin waits for the unspeakable gift. When men shall have seen the full evidence of the Dispensation of the Spirit—when years, centuries, almost millenniums, of holy lives and blessed deaths, shall have completely attested the new Gospel as the power of God unto salvation—then indeed 'they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation'—they that deliberately close eye and heart against the demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ascribe the fruits of the Spirit to the influence of a delusion and

a lie, and suffer neither love nor holiness to draw them to the confession of God in Christ in the Holy Ghost, will indeed have sinned that sin unto death which hath never forgiveness in this world or in that which is to come.

It is of no practical moment to us whether there is or is not just this ray of hope left for the Pharisees themselves who accused Christ upon earth of a conspiracy with evil. But it is of the greatest moment that we should understand the responsibility laid upon us of weighing honestly and earnestly the evidences of Gospel truth as they are displayed before us in the direct working, in power, in love, in holiness, of the holy and blessed Spirit of God. We can all tell, until conscience is utterly hardened, what is of God, and what is of evil. We can all recognize the voice of truth, and the voice of duty, and the voice of God—or else the opposite of each of these—in that which comes to us professing to be a revelation. We can do so by the exercise of conscience, which is (so to say) God's ear in the man, upon the thing thus presented. If we will trifle and dally with the whole matter—if we will relegate the whole question into the far country of doubt and indecision—if we will make the 'convenient season' for listening that which arrives with the mental decrepitude of old

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age or the physical incapacity of fatal sickness—or if we will set the cold scoffing intellect alone on the judgment-seat, without the assessorship of affection, of conscience, of soul, which are at least as truly as intellect constituent parts of the man as God made and as God deals with him—then we shall be in danger of coming at last to hate the light of truth and to despise the word of grace—we shall have so lost the Divine image within us as to be fit only for the companionship of that ‘subtilty’ which the fallen Spirit has for his one only relic of a ‘first estate’—we may think we have proved to demonstration that there is nothing divine in the Gospel, and yet ours may be but the reprobate judgment of men who have blasphemed fatally the Holy Ghost and are sunk below repentance as below forgiveness.

We have recognized, sufficiently perhaps for the present purpose, the nature of the unpardonable sin as it works in the non-Christian or anti-Christian nature. For this Congregation the other aspect of the subject may be the more suitable.

St Luke connects this sin with that of denying Christ. His warning is addressed to disciples. They may deny Christ, and be forgiven: ‘to him that blasphemes against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven.’ Thus he prepares us for later disclosures

which shall show how a Christian may blaspheme against the Holy Ghost, and, so doing, sin beyond forgiveness.

The three remaining Scriptures must be carefully studied. Each has its lesson. Let us give heed to each.

In the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews the sacred writer has been reproving stagnation. Considering the time, the time since your conversion, you ought now to be teachers. Yet you need still to be taught first principles—like those of repentance and faith—of the very meaning of elementary ordinances—of such elementary revelations as those of resurrection and judgment. Then the solemn thought suggests itself—And stagnation is retrogression. There can be no standing still in the life of God. If you are even ignorant, even supine and lethargic in the study of doctrine, you are in great peril of worse things. You may be on the eve of some dreadful fall—even of that which was then the great temptation of Hebrew Christians, to cast in their lot with Judaism in the struggles of its latest day of national life—and so, of absolute apostasy from the faith and life of Christ. He deals with them, in this extremity, on a footing of fear. You may have been enlightened—you may have par-

taken of the Holy Ghost—you may have tasted, not only the goodness of God's word, but even the powers of a world to come—those supernatural, those miraculous gifts which belong, as their source and spring, to a world out of sight, a world not yet unveiled in its fulness—and yet you may fall away—and if you do, it will be impossible to renew you again unto repentance—you will have 'crucified to yourself the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame.' The sin here spoken of is apostasy. The Christian man giving up his Christianity. The renewed man, the spiritual man, the possessor of the Holy Ghost, tempted, successfully tempted, to go away, and to walk no more with Jesus. This comes of idle walking first—then of standing still—then of earthly attachments, veiled under specious names, of patriotism and loyalty—at last, of sudden temptation, bidding you to spring up, gird yourself, and follow.

Equally clear, though with a character all its own, is the warning of the tenth chapter. That also is addressed to Christians. To persons who have received the knowledge, the deep, the heart-knowledge, of the truth, which is the Gospel, which is Christ. There the danger contemplated is not exactly that of apostasy. Rather is it, as the context shows, that of willing, wilful, habitual sinning. We are to draw

very near with a true heart—a heart sprinkled from an evil conscience. We are to hold fast the confession of our faith. We are to stimulate one another to love and good works. We are not to forsake the Christian assembly. All this, the more earnestly as we see the day approaching. Because, if we sin wilfully after once receiving the true knowledge of the truth, there is no further sacrifice in reserve for us, but only a fearful expectation of judgment, as for those who have trodden under foot the Son of God, counted the consecrating blood a common thing, and done despite to the Spirit of grace. The first warning was for the languid and lethargic—the second warning is for the careless and the inconsistent Christian. In both cases, the warning has its principle and its argument in this—‘There is a sin unto death.’

Thus we reach the sixth and last of these solemn utterances—that which we have made the text. St John has been telling of the power of prayer. ‘We know that He hears’—therefore ‘whatsoever we ask, we know that we have.’ Let us try the force of prayer, he says, in intercession. You see your brother sin—pray for him. What so natural, to the spiritual? Ask, he says, and you shall give him life—instrumentally you shall give him life. But is there then, he goes on to say, is there a universal, an un-

conditional promise attached to intercession? Is it so, that we may single out the wickedest, the most unprincipled, the most presumptuous of sinners, and count God our debtor to give that man life at our poor bidding? 'There is a sin,' St John says, 'unto death: it is not concerning it that I speak when I bid you pray.' That is the whole of his word. He recognizes an unpardonable sin. He says, When you pray for another, you must always bear in mind that there is a sin unto death. Your brother may have sinned it—if so, your prayer must come back into your bosom. You cannot always tell. You can but exercise such judgment as God and the truth gives you. You must pray for the 'sinner not unto death.' You can give a good guess who he is. You see your poor brother, weak and infirm and easily tempted, yet (as you hope) having the root of the matter in him—you know nothing why you should not hope—you know not that he is wilfully sinning—pray for him. Yet remember, God, who knows all things, may know that that prayer is vain. Count not God untrue if He acts upon His Son's word that there is a sin unto death. Pray, if you will, even for him—but pray with an 'if' and a peradventure. If God hears not, if that soul is not saved, bear in mind that Christ said, that God says by

His Spirit, There is an unpardonable sin—I do not say that he shall pray for it.

Brethren ! our general topic is, The Reign of Sin. And it seemed to be one part of that great thesis, that we should recognize that sin which is so solemnly allowed and made room for in the Holy Word. I would say a last thing or two upon it.

And, first, in the way of admonition. You have seen in what direction or directions it lies. You have seen it in the direction of the unbeliever. And, alas ! there are unbelievers now even in the Church—therefore in the Churches. You see how you may sin the unpardonable sin in the direction of unbelief plain and simple. You may say, Christ, good as He is, pure as is His doctrine, strong as is His proof, may have been in concert and complicity with Satan. That is what the unbeliever says, who admits the morality of Jesus Christ and the Gospel, yet thinks that all the rest of the Gospel, all the rest of Jesus Christ—and he cannot deny that it is nine-tenths of the whole—is mere fancy, enthusiasm, or enthusiasm mixed with imposture. Now to say this is to sin against the Holy Ghost. If Jesus Christ is all holy, if every word of His Gospel is clearly and strongly and unmistakably against sin, for holiness, for self-denial, for God, then to impute to Him error, or fancy, or

fanaticism, or anything but reality, is to blaspheme the Holy Ghost—is to say, Christ and the devil are in league—truth and falsehood, sin and holiness, God and God's enemy, are conspiring for my deception, for my ruin.

Again, there is a risk of the sin unto death even among believers—among those who have once seen with the soul's eye the reality of things invisible—who have once tasted the good word, and felt in themselves the powers of the world to come. Even these may sin the sin unto death. It is very dreadful. We are never safe. Do not expect it. We may become indifferent about Christ's teaching. We may never get beyond repentance and faith. That is serious. We ought to be able to build upon the good foundation—to assume baptism and confirmation and go on unto perfection—unto maturity—the fulness of the stature. It is a serious word, as regards doctrine. We are, many of us, dwarfed and stunted, yea, deformed and maimed, Christians. We have never risen, never ascended, never even grown. We are where we were at twenty, at fifteen—and we complain of any teaching which carries us upward and onward. We call it abstruse, mystical, perhaps moral, perhaps legal. Brethren, these things ought not so to be. Study the Ephesians, study the Colossians, study the

Philippians—and see how St Paul grew, even in his prison. Never depart from the foundation, but never rest there. Be always learning, always growing. When you cease to aspire, you cease to live. When you cease to live, you become a dead thing—sin gets dominion over you—and you are cut off from Christ. Or we may become indifferent about Christian living. We may forsake the assembling—we may become indifferent to sin—another's sin, or ours. We may let the enemy in again, once expelled—and, by little and little, fall again and be overcome. Again, the sin unto death.

You will perhaps say that this was a gloomy subject. I am sure that we need it—every one of us. There is no man that sinneth not—no man that is not too gentle towards his own sins. We will not complain if the 'righteous smite us friendly and reprove us.' 'It shall be an excellent oil, that shall not break the head.'

Yet let not any humble self-misgiving soul be weighed down by that which has been in all ages a subject of fear to the fearful—lest it should be chargeable with this sin of sins which hath never forgiveness. The fear is for the presumptuous, not for the fearful. He who has committed this sin will be found among the former, not among the latter.

It is meant that we should be watchful—it is not meant that we should be cowardly. Let us live near to God—let us guard our hearts with all diligence—let us take heed to our steps—let us be willing to be warned—let us challenge all comers into the porch and into the gateway of the life, that we may see whether they be (in Christ's sense) friends or foes—and we shall not be moved. 'Happy is the man that feareth alway'—he shall not be ashamed when God enters with him into judgment. 'If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves—if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

VII.

SIN RE-CRUCIFYING THE SON OF GOD.

HEBREWS VI. 6.

They crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh.

THE Reign of Sin is not ended. There are two kingdoms still. One is the kingdom of time and sense, of earth and the world, of flesh and the devil. The other is the kingdom of eternity, of heaven, of the Spirit, of Christ, of God. Christians are translated, St Paul says, from the one to the other. But, though they are no longer subjects of Sin, they still live (if I might so express it) locally within its jurisdiction. Sin has its ministers and its magistrates, its laws and its penalties, all over the human universe—and it can make the life of those who do not own its authority a very hard life and a very struggling life, even if they succeed in resisting and defying it. Great misery, great self-reproach, which

is the chief of miseries, is caused by misapprehending this. If we imagine that the reign of sin is ended because the reign of Christ side by side with it is begun, we are framing to ourselves not only an ideal but (which is a different thing) an unreal life, of which the facts are each day in conflict and collision with the theories.

Some have asked themselves, How could Christ really suffer, as the Gospels represent, in the garden of Gethsemane, when He knew that the hour of victory, of glorious redemption, was so close at hand? Does it not imply either an unaccountable, almost an unworthy, shrinking from a few hours of exquisite pain—or else, which we cannot admit either, an unconsciousness of the Deity within, which was making His work so gloriously effective for its end?

The true answer is found—or a part of it—in the thought just breathed. The Reign of Sin was to be a reality still, for long centuries at least, although its supremacy is broken for all believers. The victory was not all at once a triumph. Not yet, not for ages to come, was there to be such a ‘putting to open shame’ of the powers and authorities of evil as could alone make the contemplation of Christ’s work an unmixed congratulation. We may suppose, that, as Christ sighed in saying the Ephphatha which was to

unseal one deaf ear and loose one stammering tongue—and as Christ ‘groaned in Himself and was troubled’ when He was on His way to the grave of one dead man whose resurrection for that time would be followed by a second dying, and would work no deliverance in the earth for myriads of other sufferers and other mourners—so was it when He was passing towards the consummation of His own great redemptive work through the Passion and the Cross and the Grave. He saw, in the depths of that mind from which nothing can lie hid, the continuance, even after the Redemption, of the Reign of Sin—saw, in other words, what would have made His Passion a failure had it not been deliberately recognized and contemplated as to be—the very thing which we have reserved for our latest subject in the course which ends this evening—

Sin, perpetually, though not eternally, re-crucifying the Son of God.

It is a sorrowful subject, brethren—and yet, like all true sorrow, it is ‘heavenly’ too—‘it strikes where it doth heal.’ Like all true sorrow—I venture to say, like all real truth. The wretched thing, the thing indeed cruel and cureless and desperate, is falsehood. Tell us the truth—whether it be about ourselves or about the world—and be sure God has a

medicine for it, however painful. May it be so with this truth—though it sounds as though it had no comfort—Sin re-crucifying the Son of God.

The text represents certain persons as doing this by a particular course of life. But we shall put no violence upon Scripture if we extend the statement beyond its primary scope. I want to set before you, with such poor strength as may be given, the aspect of Sin towards the Cross—the face-to-face meeting between Sin and the Cross—the way in which Sin passes and repasses Calvary, aware that the Cross is, aware what the Cross means, and yet dealing with that knowledge in a way as surprising as it is sorrowful.

On that Cross, all Christendom knows, the Son of God hung to take away Sin. We believe that that old way of putting it is the truest, the most certain, the most satisfactory, as it is the most Scriptural. 'By His one oblation of Himself once offered He made there a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.' That sacrifice was an Atonement first. We know not how, but we do know, that in that death lies our forgiveness first of all. Before it is any thing else, the Cross is our hope of pardon. There is more in it—but there is this. And what else there is is

there because of this. This is the old faith of the Church. This is that which the Christian world sees and feels as one man. This it is which brings together a Congregation of eight or ten thousand people on a week-day evening in the great Cathedral of London, not so much to hear a performance of music, but (as you might see and feel was the case with that concourse) really to pay homage to the Passion of Jesus as the world's Saviour.

We might think it incredible that Christendom itself, that any of those who thus own and feel the meaning as well as the pathos of the Cross of Christ should 'for themselves' (as the text expresses it), for their own private pleasure as it were, repeat and react that terrible scene—the Crucifixion of the Son of God. But it is so. It was Sin—not an abstract thing, not even that principle or kernel of sin in the man prior to sinning, of which we have so often spoken in these Sermons—no, it was the aggregate of sinful acts, it was the sum total of wicked, godless, disobedient, lustful, dishonest, cruel things done, from the day of the Fall onwards, upon this poor dishonoured disfigured earth's surface—it was this which crucified Christ once. It is quite plain, that, though atonement, pardon, justification (if we must use the theological term), was the first thing intended and

aimed at by the Cross, yet that very aim and intention was directly antagonistic and hostile to sinning—inso much that pardon itself is not where sinning is persisted in—atonement itself becomes a mockery and a delusion where (like a certain kind of faith) it ‘is dead being alone.’ So then all sinning now is a re-crucifixion—it is a disregard, it is a despite, it is more—it is a re-binding and re-nailing and re-torturing and re-agonizing and re-killing of Him whose one death was the sufficient sin-bearing and therefore the intended sin-eradication and sin-extirpation for ever.

Yet Sin survives—and Sin, as a matter of fact, reigns.

It is not surprising that it still reigns where the Cross is unknown. That was to be expected. That might be a tribute, an evidence at least, though a sad one, to the necessity, and even (by contrast) to the efficacy, of the death of the Son of God. It is not wonderful that ‘the dark places of the earth are still full of the habitations of cruelty.’ Not wonderful—it shows the Cross by contrast—it furnishes a ready appeal for the Cross uplifted and the Cross pleaded for: the Cross uplifted there, at the other side of the universe, would stay, we say, this plague of death could it but be brought into it. No wonder that,

where Christ is unknown, He should be outraged and re-crucified day by day. Idolatry, and all its ministering crimes and vices and horrors—superstition, and all its attendant self-imprisonments and self-tortures and self-gibbetings—are in one sense re-crucifyings of the Son of God, but in another sense prove His one crucifixion a necessity of fallen man.

Yet even these are a reproach, and a contradiction, and a waste of blood, not to be trifled with or glossed over. Even these things explain sufficiently why the great victory should have been no triumph. They make the Cross a failure so far, so long. Here, at least, Sin reigns.

How much more when Sin reigns in sight, in face, in front, of the Cross! Christ hangs there, full in view, and there is no end, scarcely any visible limit, to the sinning. It is always going on—persistently, obstinately, insolently going on, and being done over and over again—where Christ is named, where the Cross is held sacred, where men worship on the faith of it, where men mean to die pleading it. What can we say to this? Certainly we cannot deny it. If any one were hardy enough to do so, I would go aside with him and argue with him concerning the two things—his hope, and his life. No, he would not

need this. He would confess himself in one breath a believer, and a sinner—a sinner, not by theological construction, not by ecclesiastical propriety, not by doctrinal orthodoxy, but a sinner in act and deed and reality.

Certainly this was not meant so to be. This was not the idea of the Christian body. ‘Called to be saints,’ this was the superscription. Surely, if it is not true, or in whatever community or in whatever degree it is not true, in so far the Cross has been a failure, even amongst its own. Was it for this, think we, Christ died—to purchase to Himself a peculiar people, who should just hold the orthodox formula of justification, and live their own lives? Was it worth while—we ask earnestly, and wait an answer—to expend Incarnation and Passion and precious Death and sorrowful Burial upon such an insubstantial ‘wrack’ as this? Was Christendom, with all its advantages—and they estimate them most truly who set them highest—was a Christendom worth this price? Look round your own neighbourhood, your own street, your own home—read your Newspaper, with its Assize and Police reports—draw your inferences from statistics, from the component items of your vast national income, to which if industry adds its thousands, intemperance contributes its ten thou-

sands—or gather in, if you have the knowledge, what a wider survey, a survey of countries and continents, can tell you, of the condition of Romanist lands and Lutheran, as to the actual prevalence there of a truly Christ-like Cross-like conduct amongst those who name the name and even too idolatrously reverence the emblem—ask then, ask seriously, and give the answer. Is Christ dead for something or for nothing amongst His own—amongst the baptized, the worshipping peoples—amongst those nations of whom *we* are? Is there nothing, even here, of a doing despite, a treading underfoot, a crucifying afresh?

But I know you will say, Of course no spiritual agencies can move multitudes—aggregates in the aggregate. What we must look at, in all such questions, is the individual. Sorrowfully I accept the correction. I know that in these things souls are the factors—nationalities are but the products, the rude, the imperfect, the approximate results. Is there then, granting the general deficit, the world-wide failure—is there such a surplus, and such a success, in individual instances, as shall make it indeed, visibly, worth while for the God of spirits to have interposed the Cross of His Son?

Brethren! we do not doubt the reply to a question thus proposed. The Cross of Christ is a power—a mighty, an Almighty power, upon this earth. It is a

power where no other powers intrude themselves. It is a power in the warfare of living men with sin, and of dying men with death. What can we say more?

And yet—and yet—when we press the question home, there is a more doubtful, a more precarious answer. The individual Christian, what of him—seen as we see one another, seen as we see ourselves—what of him? What of him, as to this matter of the recrucifying?

There are times, brethren, when we write bitter things against ourselves—when there is not a word in the most abject of penitential Psalms which seems one stroke or one tittle too strong for us in its expression of utter wickedness and utter vileness. There are times—and he who has known them must feel that dust and ashes and sackcloth and iron girdle would be light and trivial pains in comparison—when the general idea of sin becomes very real, very personal, to us—when we have to feel, often quite unexpectedly, I see the Cross, I know what it means, I believe in it, not (I trust) in name only, and yet here I am sinning—sin creeps over me, sin worms itself into me, sin disguises itself and so slays, sin wears the mark of a virtue, of a duty, certainly of an innocence, comes to me as something quite harmless, quite amiable, quite neutral at worst—and here, before I know where I am, I discover myself sinning.

Jesus Christ hangs there, in full view, all the time, on His Cross, I know perfectly well why—in general terms, nay, in true general feeling, I confess and I adore—and here is the commemoration, the great annual week, of the Passion—and I hear the Passion Music, and I sing the Passion Hymns—and yet I sin—yes, if sin be what the text refers to, I can even crucify to myself the Son of God afresh, and put Him, over again, to an open shame.

For it is an ‘open shame,’ brethren, to which Christian sinning puts Him. If it were an avowed enemy that did this, it would matter less. Christ can guard His little ones from violent attack—the sneer of the scoffer, the ridicule of the libertine, the assault of the infidel, can do little, very little, to shake the constancy of one who says, ‘I know, for all that, whom I have believed.’ But the sinning of the supposed, self-supposed Christian—that which breathes itself inside holy homes, that which insinuates itself into some young, trusting, loving heart, which is ready to think a thing right because it sees you do it, till it is rudely, frightfully awakened by a shock which has but one accounting for—this is what undermines, what counterworks—this is what re-crucifies. O God, keep us all watching, praying, fearing alway, lest we hurt, lest we offend, lest we add a thorn to that crown, a stripe to that scourging, a nail to that crucifying—

‘ye know the greatness of the crime, and also the horrible punishment that must ensue.’

‘Must ensue.’ Yes, for the Son of God, who hangs on that Cross, is mighty, mightiest, in His weakness. ‘He made Himself empty,’ St Paul said last Sunday—meaning, of His present use and enjoyment and exercise of that Deity which was His of right, of that heaven which was the home of the Coequal. But He could not divest Himself of the very Deity itself—it abode with Him in His humiliation—it spake and it acted, it shone and it lightened, in every word and look and lineament of that life such as never man lived—most of all in that death, apparently of shame and uttermost degradation, which certainly never man so died. On that Cross, as from a throne, He bestowed pardon and forgiveness—soothed the life’s remorse, and opened a Paradise on the instant—‘to-day,’ He said, as One having authority, having the keys of hell and death. Therefore I say ‘must,’ when I speak of the consequences of re-crucifying. It must be a dangerous, a hazardous, a terrible thing, to try conclusions with the Son of God—to bid Him die twice—to say to Him now in heaven, not, with mocking Rabbis, Come down from Thy Cross—but, Ascend Thy cross again. The first crucifixion is void, is vain—give us a

second: we have sinned away one—open afresh the fountain of a new propitiation!

Brethren! the word is almost spoken for this time. The opportunities of this Lent are almost ended. If Lent itself is the Church's trying and measuring time, let this night be such to us concerning this Lent. How did it find, how shall it leave us? I can frame many answers. For myself one—for you more than one. I can hear from the soul's oracle one voice saying, I am nothing bettered, I rather grow worse—sin more vexing, more harassing, more powerful than ever—grace weaker, more unpersuasive, more feeble in utterance, in motive, in effect, than ever. O for a voice which shall indeed reach, a hand which shall indeed touch, a power which shall indeed control, a love which shall at last draw me! All the texts, all the doctrines, all the revelations, all the prayers and Psalms, I have them by heart—they seem to be worn out for me—I hear, I speak, I emphasize, I reiterate—it is a tale of little meaning, though the words be strong. And these Lectures on Sin—all very true, very correct, very emphatic—yet they say nothing to me—I come and I go, I hear and I depart—my soul hath appetite, hath hunger and thirst, still. My life, and the heart out of which are life's issues, these are where they were, and what they were, still.

Then let us carry the matter where we know there is strength—truth and love and reality, and nought else. Wash thy Lent in tears of repentance—wash thy repentance itself in the blood of Christ. To the mercy-seat, to the throne, the throne of grace, with thy sorrows, thy fears, and thy misgivings! One moment of prayer—true heart-prayer before the heart-searching Hearer—is worth volumes of Sermons, is worth millions of ordinances. And if prayer will not flow, kneel there silent in thy solitude. Prayer, in God's sight, is not speaking—'Tibi silet laus, O Deus!' And if praise, the truest, deepest, most acceptable praise, lies thus deeper than words, shall it not be so with prayer? O that wonderful thing—that all-comprehending, all-quickenning, all-brightening, all-moving power! man's one, characteristic, inalienable possession—to think his thought into the ear of God, knowing that He heareth! To live without prayer, is to live like the beasts that perish—nay, worse—for they pray their prayers, in mute but audible entreaty, into the mind of their deity, man—and shall he, privileged above them, fall below them in his use? Be this, tonight, the last, the best, the dearest work of each one of us—and Lent, for us, even at its eleventh hour, shall yet be a very gate and porch and vestibule of Heaven.

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

I.

MATTHEW VI. 9.

Our Father, which art in heaven.

‘THE Lord’s Prayer.’ Think of it first as such. The Master’s Prayer. He whose we are, once, twice, and thrice over—who owns because He created, who owns because He redeemed, who owns because He is recreating, who owns because He has a heaven for us, and a life after death, to which the present life is but the porch or the antechamber—composed this prayer, uttered it on earth, caused it to be written as a part of His Gospel, and left it, like His holy Sacrament, as a thing to be treasured and used in remembrance of Him. In this way it has come to be what no other form of words ever can be to the Churches. It was given in direct answer to that which has been the cry of hearts in all time, ‘Lord, teach us to pray.’ This form of words was the answer. ‘When ye pray, say.’ ‘After this manner pray ye.’

In using this prayer, we are exercising our Christian unity in a way about which there can be no mistake. There are ideas of unity, which never can be realized while man is man. There will always be diversities of form, which are of no consequence. There will always be differences of mind and thought, inside the same form—fatal, some of them, to the reality of unity. But they who can pray together the Lord's Prayer, in spirit and in truth, must be substantially at one. The Church of all space and of all time meets, and is one, in the Master's Prayer. It is itself a sacrament of holy communion. The aspirations of eighteen centuries have gone up to God in it.

It is also the everlasting warrant for prayer itself. The Master said, 'Pray.' Men may argue against the efficacy of prayer, may put a thousand difficult cases, and ask, 'How can prayer be of any use in this circumstance and that? how can prayer arrest the march of consequence, or stay the course of law, moral or natural?' We say in reply, The Lord of earth and heaven, *who must know*, takes prayer for granted—saying, 'When ye pray'—and not only condescends to it as an instinct of conscious weakness, but actually bids us to pray, and gives us a prayer.

In this most elementary form of our subject we see its significance. We have announced 'The Lord's

Prayer' as the subject of discourse and meditation this Lent. It is the object of every Sermon and of every Service to bring men into communion with God. The spiritual life has no meaning and no existence except as that thing of which prayer is the exercise and the enjoyment. Therefore we are here at the very fountain of living water, and have but to ask the blessing of Almighty God upon the drawing and upon the drinking.

We will not spend much time upon preliminaries to our subject, however interesting. A word or two must suffice.

(1) We have two forms of the Lord's Prayer—one given in the sixth chapter of St Matthew, and the other in the eleventh chapter of St Luke. They are not precisely the same, even as they stand in our Version. But we live in critical days—and the careful study of Manuscripts, Versions, and Fathers, has led to a yet further discovery of differences between St Matthew's form and St Luke's. One early Greek Father, Origen—and one early Latin Father, Augustine—expressly say that St Luke omits the third petition, 'Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven,' and shortens the sixth by the omission of the latter clause, 'But deliver us from evil'—giving reasons, in each case, for the variety. Yes, my brethren, the Word of

God, like His air, like His light, like His sea, like His Providence, like His Spirit, is very free—it is not a letter, but a spirit—it never repeats itself—it is not printed, not stereotyped—no, it is a voice—a voice, even after it is written—and variety is its characteristic. The Name and the Kingdom imply, contain in themselves, the Will—if that clause of the Prayer be omitted, the substance of it survives in the other two: and if the express prayer for ‘deliverance from evil,’ or ‘from the evil one,’ is not added in St Luke, yet the mention of ‘temptation’ involves it, and the petition against temptation includes it.

If we allude here to such questions, be assured it is with a practical purpose. We would caution ourselves against a servile treatment, even of the Lord’s Prayer. If the Evangelists, if their Lord, had designed this Prayer for what later ages turned it into, a charm and a ‘Pater Noster,’ no doubt there would have been no such varieties in its representation. And if the early, the Apostolical, Church had so used it, no doubt the variety of transcription would have had no room and no existence. Surely we may read here the correction of an error which has been the plague and pest of the Church of later times—the idolatry of the letter—not least in reference to the sacred Book, and to the one formula of worship which that Book enshrines.

(2) Another interesting question, meeting us on the threshold, touches the occasion, or occasions, on which the Lord's Prayer was given. St Matthew places it in the Sermon on the Mount. St Luke records it as the answer of our Lord on some occasion of His praying in the sight of His disciples; who, when He ceases, beg of Him some instruction about praying, such as may enable them to exercise the duty with something of His power, fervour, and enjoyment. There are persons who imagine St Luke to give us the real account, and St Matthew's place of the Prayer to be inexact. It would be easier to accept this—which, after all, makes it but a question of arrangement—if the two accounts of the Prayer, St Luke's and St Matthew's, had been precisely the same. As it is, in the absence of all proof, with no guide but conjecture, it may seem not only safer and more reverent, but also more consistent and reasonable, to suppose that the Prayer itself was twice communicated—once in the midst of warnings and cautions respecting the exercise of devotion generally, and once (in a somewhat briefer form) in answer to the express request of the disciples, 'Lord, teach us to pray.'

(3) One word should be added as to the deeply interesting question, whether the Lord's Prayer is, in

each separate particular, an original document. Diligent search has been made, amongst the recorded sayings of the Rabbis, and some expressions have been found, as to God's 'name' and God's 'kingdom' which might seem to anticipate the introduction of those topics into the great Christian Prayer. Brethren! what of this? Where, in our Lord Jesus Christ, is there any repudiation of existing good? With what satisfaction, with what joy, would He have found one scrap of God's truth in the 'doctors' amongst whom He sate, at twelve years old, in God's Temple. 'Far, far was the Lord,' Grotius says, 'from all affectation of an unnecessary novelty.' Gladly would He have incorporated, could He but find it, one petition of the Synagogue into a Prayer designed for the Universal Church. But it is far more true, and more satisfactory, to remind ourselves that these Rabbis were themselves students and teachers of the Old Testament, and that they could not read Exodus without finding God's 'name,' nor Daniel without finding God's 'kingdom,' and that our Lord Jesus Christ was not to close Exodus or close Daniel because others, His creatures, had read them before Him. Away with the childish cavil, that He, the Everlasting and the All-true, was to sit at the feet of Rabbi Eliezer or Rabbi Gamaliel to learn the use of Scriptures which His own Spirit

had written down for His Church of the Old Testament or for His Church of the New!

The whole force of the Lord's Prayer lies in its combination and in its unity. The two great commandments, the love of God, and the love of man, lay embedded in the Mosaic Scriptures. None the less was it Christ's work, a work as much of originality as of authority, to draw out those two precepts and make them the whole of Christian doctrine. Even so the Lord's Prayer loses nothing of its creative originality by being brought into being out of elements pre-existing. The wants of fallen men are the wants of all time: the Word of God is one in all time, and its grandeur lies in its world-wide and time-long applicability.

(4) 'After this manner therefore pray ye.' 'When ye pray, say.'

Read here then the warrant for, and the specimen of, a liturgy. Christ prohibits not other forms. He forbids not to pray without forms. All that is from the heart is audible, is acceptable, is welcome, in heaven. But unquestionably He silences here the silly tradition that nothing can be prayer but that which is extemporaneous and sudden. Unquestionably the principle of a form is here—not of form without spirit, yet of spirit embodied, incarnate, incorporate

in form. Neither with regard to prayers nor to sermons does the question lie between written and unwritten, but between formal and spiritual, between an utterance real and an utterance unreal, to the speaker and to the worshipper. 'After this manner'—not necessarily or always in these words. 'After this manner'—thus fully, thus concisely—thus gravely, thus earnestly—thus in sense and in spirit—better if thus even in order and method.

OUR FATHER, WHICH ART IN HEAVEN.

We have here, first, a revelation.

'Israel after the flesh' was taught, indeed, a national sonship. 'Doubtless Thou art our Father.' 'Am not I thy Father which begat thee?'

Brethren! we are taught to mistrust, as a ground of personal access, anything which is not personal. To speak of 'the redemption of the world' is indeed right and true and substantial. It is in the universal that the individual finds its standing-place and its starting-point. Any limitation is fatal to the trust. Any condition, introduced at that point, bars the entrance. Yet the force and the fire of the universal lies in the personal. The logic is perfect—If of all, then of me—draw the inference. 'Loved us'—then 'loved me.' And from the individual we go back

strongly and irrefragably to the universal. If 'Our Father,' then 'My Father'—if mine, then ours.

In this one word lies revelation—lies the Gospel. Jesus Christ stands upon the earth, and declares God a Father.

Great grace is in the word. First of all, it supersedes all human will and human action as regards the relationship. If our Lord Jesus Christ had said, 'When ye pray, say, Our Friend,' ten thousand doubts would have sprung up and checked the utterance. A Friend implies the concurrence of two wills. We may speak of a family friend, an hereditary friend, and we may feel that in that name there is involved something of a claim prior to merit, independent of character, offering security for kind construction and for long patience. Still, at some point or other, in the relation of friendship, there has been a concurrence, a joint action, of two wills—friendship cannot always have been all on one side—and herein lies the difference between Friend and Father.

No exercise of will can procure for me, and no amount of demerit can forfeit for me, the fact, the existence, of a sonship and a Fatherhood. Even in the far country, where the prodigal son is feeding swine, not memory alone, but consciousness, recognizes a relationship between himself and a far-off

person, whom he confidently calls his father. And when he forms the resolution to escape from his misery and his destitution, and to seek again the land and the home which for years have been to him but a dream and an illusion, he frames into words, without a doubt or a peradventure, the confession with which he will present himself at the door of that house and that heart, and it begins with the assertion of an inalienable relationship—‘I will say to him, Father.’

We press this thought again and again, because we feel that in it lies, not only the one hope, but the one possibility, of fallen humanity. Human teachers may say, Repent, and believe, and amend—and then, perhaps, God may receive you—then, perhaps, in the course of years, you may be forgiven—then, perhaps, when death comes, you need not despair. Christ says, When ye pray—when ye first begin to pray—when the thought first comes to you, I am not happy, I am not at peace, I am far from home—say, at once, without waiting for fitness, without raising the question of a satisfactory repentance, without investigating your ‘evidences,’ whether of Christian faith or godly sorrow—begin by saying, ‘Father’—begin by going straight home, and, when you have done so, unbosom yourself instantly as to One who already loves you, and to whom you owe, twice and thrice over, your being.

I read no restriction here upon the use of this Prayer. True, it is framed on the supposition that Christ has redeemed, has bought us back, by His blood, into a sonship forfeited by sin. I do not say that the Lord's Prayer is for those who reject or repudiate Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Whosoever uses it must use it at least as His—and then, surely, 'he that is not against us is for us.' I do not believe that there is one person here present, who may not honestly and acceptably kneel down and call God his Father. The Lord's Prayer is the prayer of fallen, ignorant, sinful Humanity—use it earnestly, and there shall be an answer. In using it, you will learn, and you will grow. Nay, if you stopped with those two words, 'Our Father'—and perhaps they are all that the child, all that the poor, all that the common worshipper, really understands of the Lord's Prayer—you would have done the chief part of prayer—you would have stepped across the barrier—you would have seen God—you would have put your life into God's life—you would have felt the meaning of it—you would have seen it all as a plan and as a discipline—you would have become reconciled to your place and to your lot—you would have realized a new relationship, of which 'the nature and the name is Love.'

And when faith has said, 'Father,' then love steps in, and adds, 'Our.' There is no selfishness, no isolation, no exclusiveness, in that sonship. He who revealed the sonship revealed also the brotherhood. And so the prayer becomes an intercession too. Is not that the very idea of intercession? Some of us are burdened with many wants and many sorrows which are not our own. And we find it difficult to pray them. We find self busy even in our prayers—and when self is satisfied, prayer ends. We imagine some separate chapter of intercession—and we never reach it. But Christ says, Bear others upon your heart all through—pray for yourself and them in one—say, 'Our Father,' and prayer is intercession at once. Take your friend with you, take your pastor, take your Church, take your people—yea, take your enemy too and your slanderer—in recollection and in intention, and kneel with them, as one, in your own prayer and in your own confession. So, at the very spring and fountain-head of your life, you will have cast in the salubrious tree which shall make every Marah of your converse sweetness. He for whom you have prayed in your own prayer cannot be your enemy—you must rejoice in his welfare, not in his undoing—for is not his Father yours, and did you not pray for him in yourself?

Finally, 'which art in heaven.' 'In the heavens.'

With what purpose are these words added to the definition of God? Is it to mark distance and contrast? Is it to enforce reverence—to say, Remember the vastness, the purity, the calm of that sky; and there think of God—away from earth's littleness, and earth's defilement, and earth's din? 'He is in heaven, and thou upon earth—let thy words be few.'

Some of these are true thoughts, beautiful and Scriptural—they ought to be in us when we pray.

Yet surely the thought is something distinct and different from any of these.

'Heaven' is the opposite, the correlative, of earth. It is God's presence; and that presence cannot be one of intermixture or confusion with the creature.

But the place of the words here teaches us that that heaven, which is essentially inaccessible and unapproachable to the created, is, in Christ, brought down to earth. Not only is our Father there, but we can speak to Him as there, and yet be audible. 'He whose are the heavens is our Father: high and wide as heaven is, so is His presence—yet the heaven opens to all who know God as their Father. In Christ they have access: in Christ He draws nigh to them as they speak, and answers.'

II.

MATTHEW VI. 9.

Hallowed be thy Name.

THE Lord's Prayer the only liturgy of Divine Inspiration—the Lord's Prayer the point of union for all lands and for all ages, for all Christians and for all the Churches—the Lord's Prayer the Divine warrant for prayer itself; the Christian's answer to all such as would raise infidel objections to the idea of prayer, as superfluous, as presumptuous, as inconsistent with invariable laws of cause and consequence, of Divine action and human suffering—these topics have been briefly touched upon. The Lord's Prayer, in its two forms and two occasions of utterance, a witness to the freedom of the Word and the versatility of the Spirit—the Lord's Prayer, in its order and combination, an original document, in the only sense in which originality is a mark of Divinity—the Lord's

Prayer a Revelation, in reference to the Object of all Prayer, and the birthright of the creature, universally redeemed, to the relation of sonship and the privilege of worship—the Lord's Prayer the Divine correction of selfishness—the Lord's Prayer, finally, the opening of direct communication between earth and heaven—these points also were noticed, on the first Day of Lent, in connection with the address which prefaces and motives the whole—'Our Father, which art in heaven.'

We are to proceed to-night with the petitions. They are clearly six, not seven, in number : three, of which the key-note is 'Thy'—and three, of which the key-note is 'Our.' God stands first, and self is nowhere. In these two particulars, the Lord's Prayer is unique. When man kneels to pray, he begins with self, and he ends with it. Confession, petition, thanksgiving, these three—sometimes no confession, sometimes no thanksgiving—but at most these three—contain and complete his worship. Even the possession of the Lord's Prayer has not counteracted this primary instinct, this original sin, of the fallen.

Brethren, we all know and feel the difficulty of praying. It is the complaint, it is the misery, 'yea, of such as are regenerate.' Did not the Saviour contemplate, did He not mercifully minister to, this

distress of His people, in the very form which He gave to 'teach them to pray?'

(1) First, He said this. 'When ye pray, say, Our Father.' Say it, whosoever and whatsoever ye be. Say it, not because you are good, not because you are obedient, dutiful, or even believing, but almost for the opposite reason—because you have nothing, and are nothing, and must fall back upon God alone for your hope and for your plea. No man can give himself a father—and no man, not even if he be an exile, an outcast, and an outlaw, can ever cancel or forfeit his parentage. This is a relation prior to action, prior to volition, prior therefore to merit and demerit—a fact for all time; a substantial reality over which change and sin can have no power. God the Creator, God the Redeemer, God the Comforter, is 'Our Father' whether we will or no: and when, in the far country of our want and of our ruin, we speak, ever so doubtfully, of a return and a supplication, we cannot help calling Him by that Name—if we used any other, it would be a fabrication and a lie—'I will arise and go to my Father.'

We appeal to your consciences, we lay bare our own, when we give this as half the occupation of many men's religion—of many men's prayer, if prayer it can be called—the endeavour to settle their rela-

tionship to God; the perpetual to and fro of a restless disquieted spirit, as to its right to address God at all, and, if at all, then in what character and in what relation. Thus we lash ourselves with vain scourges of mistrust and self-tormenting; and we rise again with the riddle unsolved, or with a peradventure of hope and salvation drawn rather from the shifting fitful feeling, than from the one unvarying Word of Him that cannot lie.

O that we would pray the Lord's Prayer! There that question is settled once for all. 'When ye pray, say.' Yes, thou, the confident, too confident, Simon Barjona—and thou, the diffident, too diffident, Thomas called Didymus—and thou, who shall gainsay it? the traitor that shalt be, Judas—when ye pray, say, 'Our Father.' The difficulty is not here. God is your Father, and 'He dealeth with you as with sons.' If you will not have Him—if you will flee away, and feed swine—it must be so. But lash not yourselves with idle fears as to the sonship and the Fatherhood—lie not there, ye who would give your all to be sons, grovelling in the mire of a self-made self-imagined serfdom and villenage—that is not the question, whether ye are sons—but only whether, being sons, ye will have Him and own and love Him as a Father.

The revelation of the universal Father is thus the first step—we all feel it so—towards prayer.

(2) But then begin other difficulties.

I can scarcely call them so, in comparison with that first. For, when once there has settled itself in the soul the thought, 'God is my Father,' it seems natural that we should be on His side—natural that we should take interest in His will, His work, and His glory.

And so Christ bids us, in the second place, when we pray, to begin with God.

That which might seem to put prayer further from us does just the contrary.

O, if one of us could honestly say, '*I* do not signify—I, a very insignificant, very worthless, very sinful being—I, who am but of yesterday, and to-morrow shall not be—it matters not what I have or lack, what I enjoy or suffer, for this little moment of time, on this little atom of space—but it is all-important that the great God should be honoured and obeyed and glorified—it is all-important that the blessed Saviour should spread far and wide His wonderful Gospel, His universal reign—it is all-important that the Holy and Blessed Spirit should take up His abode in sorrowful disconsolate sin-possessed hearts, bringing order out of chaos, and heaven out

of hell—and therefore, disregarding myself, I will put God first, in all my thoughts, and in all my supplications—I say, not only, what a grand life would this make out of our littleness and our pauperism—but, which is the point now in our view, what ease, what freedom, what sweetness, would this spirit breathe at once into our prayers! O, if I could really feel that the only thing worth praying about is God Himself—that I might safely forget myself in His Name, His Kingdom, His Will—there would be an assurance, a grandeur, an elevation, in my prayers, such as would supersede doubt and guarantee acceptance. If I could only make ‘God’s kingdom and righteousness’ (in this sense) my object, I should be quite sure then that ‘all other things would be added unto me.’

(3) Once again: He who bade us to place God first in our Prayer, directed us also to put self nowhere. ‘Thine,’ and ‘Ours,’ these two—‘mine,’ ‘myself,’ nowhere.

Is this hard? Does this breathe indifference to the comfort and happiness of the praying? O not so!

Rather does it say this to us. You might scruple to ask great things (even spiritually) for yourself. You might find voice and speech checked by the remembrance of sins many and great, if you were

transgression, and sin, keeping mercy for thousands, and that will by no means clear the guilty.' God, such as He is, in mercy and righteousness, in boundless compassion and just judgment—that, that is His 'Name.'

Accordingly, you will find in many passages of the Old Testament the Name put as the equivalent of the Person. 'The Lord hear thee in the day of trouble: the Name of the God of Jacob defend thee.' 'Let him trust in the Name of the Lord, and stay upon his God.' Sometimes 'the Name' stands alone in the original Hebrew, where the English Version has added 'of the Lord.' 'He that blasphemeth the Name'—the great Name—'shall be put to death.'

There is this, always, in the 'Name' of God—that it precludes the false, the erroneous or idolatrous, conception of Him. The Name of God is always the real, the true, the revealed God, as opposed to all man's ideas and man's imaginations concerning Him.

'Thy Name,' therefore, in the Lord's Prayer is, in other words, 'Thou, such as Thou art'—'Thou, Father, as revealed in Thy Word and in Thy works; in Thy Son, and in Thy Spirit.'

To 'hallow' is to make holy. It is to set God's mark, the mark of his ownership and of His consecration, upon a thing, or upon a person—upon a day,

or upon a building, or upon a mountain—upon a portion of time, or a piece of matter—or else upon a particular man, or a particular family, or a particular nation—according to the subject, and according to the context, in each case. Instances of each of these uses will readily occur to students of the Bible.

But none of these applications of the word are suitable here. We cannot, in these senses, hallow that which is holy—still less, Him, whose ownership it is that hallows all else that is holy. There is, therefore, another recognized sense of the word in Scripture: and it is that of regarding, treating, dealing with, as holy. It is said, more than once, to Moses and Aaron, in reference to their failure in a particular act of obedience, ‘Because ye believed me not, to sanctify (hallow) me in the eyes of the children of Israel.’ They had failed to recognize God, to deal with God, as that Holy God which He is. They had led the people to think that He might be disobeyed, might be trifled with, might be lightly regarded and imperfectly served, and no harm come of it. This was not ‘hallowing His Name.’ The contrast instructs us in the interpretation.

When we pray, ‘Hallowed be Thy name,’ we pray that God, the true God, may be regarded by us and by all men—regarded, remembered, and therefore

V. S.

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dealt with—as that Holy God which He is. That we and all men—let me rather say, that, without thinking of ourselves, all men—all God’s creatures everywhere—may reverence Him as He ought to be revered. That all unworthy conceptions, and all irreverent thoughts of Him, may be done away with throughout His universe, and that He may be known, and worshipped, and revered, by all that He has made, according to His nature and according to His self-revelation.

Some man will say, ‘This is difficult, this is abstruse, this is high above me. Such a Prayer as this seems to be ill-adapted to human want and to human capacity such as we see and feel either.’ To this thought—common, natural, and often recurring—I will devote a few concluding words.

We have here a specimen of our Lord’s teaching. We have also a specimen of God’s dealing. It is no part of either to do away with mystery. No part of Revelation is so mysterious as every part of Providence. We are in a world of mystery. Enough for practical purposes—it is an old but an ever new argument—if the mysteries of the Bible and the Gospel correspond to and tally with the mysteries of nature and human life. If Christ gives us a Prayer, we must expect that it will have depths in it below our fathoming.

(1) But nothing is more remarkable than this, both in the Lord's Prayer and in the Bible—I might add, and in God's Providential dealing also—that, if there is much that the wisest and most experienced cannot explain, there is always something of which the words might have been written, 'Thou hast revealed them unto babes.' It is so here. There are those, doubtless, and they are many, who use the petition, 'Hallowed be Thy Name,' simply as a prayer against taking in vain, in common speech, the actual name of God Himself. They say this prayer, as they say the response to the third Commandment, 'Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law'—understanding it as a request for grace to avoid a profane use of the Holy Name. Thus has Christ provided for the wants of His ruder and more ignorant people. There are those, in all times, who are in danger of actual profaneness of speech.

(2) And indeed, brethren, it is but a step, from this most elementary use of the petition before us, to one most necessary for us all. When we think of our Lord's words about oaths, extending to all manner of subjects that which slaves of the 'letter' restricted to the sacred Name itself; when we remember how He teaches us the connection of God with everything

—with earth and heaven, with cities and buildings, nay, with the body of man himself—so that no place or substance is out of the reach of His presence and His consecration; we must see how wide, how all-pervading, is the risk of profaneness in our speech—how constantly we are all taking in vain names really holy—how, not only in allusions, veiled or unveiled, to the holy records of Revelation, but even in discussing earthly business and human character, in passing sentence upon books and sermons, in censuring actions or ridiculing follies, in laying positive plans (without God) of journeys or amusements, in the mere discussion of details of arrangement and employment, we are in peril, every one of us, every day and every hour, of desecrating, instead of hallowing, the very Name of God—what need, therefore, we have, of this Divine Prayer for reverence, were it but to protect us from what God counts profanity, not more in open words of levity or uncharity, than in the tendency to call ‘common’ that which God has consecrated.

(3) But how much more still when we carry the self-examination into that region in which God most of all meets us in person—those ‘thoughts and intents of the heart’ which He warns us that He discerns and must judge.

'Hallowed be Thy Name' has here a whole district and province of application, in reference to our habitual tone and temper, in secret and solitude, towards Revelation and towards God. The Greek word for 'ungodly' is borrowed from the want of 'revering'—from the absence of a spirit of reverence in the heart and in the life. Into how few men's thoughts does God enter at all, as a real Existence and a conscious Presence! Where is the life—the soul's life, I mean now—which is indeed and in truth lived as in the sight of God? To whom is it natural—I speak of the new nature—to refer to God all the purposes and all the interests of this being, which is His once, twice, and thrice, in each of us? Who is there who sets God always before Him, and never evades or eludes, in desire at least, the watchful Guardian, the loving yet most holy Friend? Who, even in his thoughts of God, is always grave, always earnest, always reverent—counting himself responsible, in his measure, alike for his own conceptions of Him, and for the impressions made by him upon another? All of us have a portion, small but real, of God's own honour confided to us—it becomes us so to think of Him, and so to speak, as that men, taking knowledge of us, may glorify our Father which is in heaven.

Shall we then go forth to pray this prayer with

more earnestness and with more understanding—‘Hallowed be Thy Name?’ Thou who hast caused Thy glory to pass before us, in Thy Son Jesus Christ, who is the brightness of Thy glory and the express image of Thy person—Thou, who hast caused Thy Holy Word to be written for our learning, that we might know Thee as Thou art, and walk ever in the light of Thy countenance—grant, we pray Thee, that we may ever remember Thee, and honour Thee, and reverence Thee, in Thy truth and in Thy grace, and bring others, by our influence and our example, to seek Thee and to follow Thee likewise. And O grant that not here only, or there, but throughout the universe of Thy creation, Thy name may be known and Thy glory manifested, so that the prophetic word may at last have its accomplishment—

‘The Lord shall be King over all the earth : in that day shall there be one Lord, and His Name one.’

III.

MATTHEW VI. 10.

Thy kingdom come.

THREE words. Weighty, instructive, monitory words. Characteristic of the Prayer—characteristic also of the Author. (1) The first lifts the thoughts upward. Reminds us of the presence, of the relationship, of the name. Corrects the selfishness which spoils and drags downward the prayer even of the regenerate. Bids us think of God, and lose ourselves in Him. (2) The second reminds us of a great system, a magnificent organization, as of some vast Empire of lives and souls, of ages and universes, of eternities and infinities, high above us, deep beneath us, before us and behind, in which we are nothing, yet which is everything to us, in which to have a place is glory, for which to be allowed to pray is the highest honour and the highest dignity of the creature. (3) The third bids us exercise this honour, this dignity, at

once. Here, as we kneel, as we utter the petition in Church, or house, or chamber, we are doing an act which implies a Divine worship, we are putting the hand to a work which is all God's, we are claiming a franchise, and a citizenship, and a priesthood, not of earth, but of heaven.

THY—KINGDOM—COME.

We will not dissect or analyse where it is all-important that we should combine and concentrate. We will try to imbue our minds with this idea, this conception, this Divine revelation—God has a Kingdom.

Scripture is full of it. We find it most prominent at two epochs of the Old Dispensation. (1) One of these is the reign of David. Not only did that reign stamp itself very forcibly upon the heart and imagination of the chosen people. Not only did it form the ideal, from which and to which all that was most vigorous and all that was most devout, in poetry and prophecy, in saint and sage, worked and taught, sang and worshipped—so that the very name of David became not more a memory than an expectation—not more a cherished heirloom than an inspired promise and an immortal hope. Far more than this. No believer in the presence of God's Hand and God's Word in the Old Testament can

doubt that the King David of the theocracy was in a very real sense the type of Christ; that God was showing in him what Christ should be when He came, alike in the manifoldness of His experience, the universality of His sympathy, and the spirituality of His character. We have nothing to do here with the faults and sins which made King David the very opposite, in one aspect, to the Holy and Blessed Saviour and Redeemer of fallen man. Mysterious as that aspect confessedly is, open as it is to the taunts and cavils of the enemy and the blasphemer, it does but heighten the contrast between the Divine and the human, without destroying the correspondence in its essential feature between the Antitype and the type. It pleased God to make this one of the most real, most characteristic offices of Him that should come—that He should be ‘a King upon His throne.’ (2) The other great epoch of prominence for the ‘kingdom’ under the Old Testament Dispensation was the period of the Captivity at Babylon. On the one hand, it was a time of despair for the royalty of Israel; on the other, it was a time of overwhelming, of crushing impressiveness for the idea of royalty itself. The Jews at Babylon lay prostrate before a world-empire, which not only overshadowed, but seemed absolutely to grind to powder, every reminis-

cence and every prospect of a royalty of their own. It was then—it was in the face and at the feet of that giant kingdom—it was in the most characteristic use of prophecy, as the corrector of sense and the revealer of spirit, as the consoler of the crushed and the inspirer of the desperate—that it pleased God to reveal to Daniel, under the figure of a kingdom independent of earth and time, that new Dispensation, that Gospel life, which should both repair the desolation of the present, and possess a vitality indestructible and eternal. ‘I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.’

Five centuries and a half ran their course, and there came a voice, first ‘in the wilderness of Judea,’ and then ‘in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim,’ of which this word ‘kingdom’ was the key-note in the language alike of the herald and the Redeemer. ‘Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Very remarkable is that selection—that unanimity

of the Baptist and the Saviour. The 'kingdom,' not the priesthood—the kingdom, not the prophetship—is the note which Christ would impress upon the very infancy of His Gospel. And you know how consistently He adhered to it. You remember the seven parables, the week of holy instruction, of the thirteenth chapter of St Matthew—how each one of them contains some marked feature of the Gospel scheme, and how each one of them, with a single exception—an exception in form, not in reality—opens with the same preface, 'The kingdom of heaven is likened' unto this or that. It was the purpose of Christ to reveal, to claim, to institute, a kingdom. 'Art thou a king, then?' 'Thou sayest that I am a king.' But 'my kingdom is not of this world.'

'Not of this world.' That is the first thought when we pray, 'Thy kingdom come.' We must put entirely on one side all images—and they are too apt to obtrude themselves—of earthly rule, whether disguised or open. We must set aside all accidental connections and alliances between Churches and States; all those adventitious advantages, as the world counts advantage, which one particular form of doctrine, of government, of ritual, may have gained for itself—much to the profit, we believe, of the State, if not

always perhaps to the equal benefit of the Church—by the favour of Sovereigns, or the wisdom of legislatures, desiring to stamp upon civil and national institutions the consecrating superscription of the name of Christ and of God. These are all matters for human thought and human action—they do not touch the real thing which is the subject of Christ's Prayer. 'Thy kingdom come' must be read and prayed in the light of His other saying, 'My kingdom is not of this world.' St Paul gives us an inspired comment upon it when he says, 'The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.'

The kingdom spoken of is a spiritual kingdom. It is the sovereignty of God in hearts. It is that reign, not of good, not of right, not of peace and forbearance and charity—these are fruits of it—but the essential thing is, that it is the reign of Our Father, revealed in His Son Jesus Christ, brought home to the man in the Holy Spirit—in hearts personally touched, separately quickened, individually dedicated and consecrated to His willing and loving service.

Each point in this statement has its direct warrant in Scripture. 'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation.' 'The kingdom of God is within

you.' 'The kingdom of God is like treasure hid in a field, which when a man hath found he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.' 'The kingdom of God is like unto leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.' The kingdom of God is like a king's marriage-feast, at which each separate guest, if he would not be disowned and ejected, must have on his wedding-garment. The kingdom of God is like a field in which tares and wheat are mingled, and in which, though the attempt to separate the two, in the present and by human agency, must fail and is forbidden, yet only the true seed and the true plant can eventually hold the ground, or find a place hereafter in God's garner. 'Except a man be born again,' into the likeness of a child's docility and a child's innocency, 'he cannot see the kingdom of God.' It is true that the kingdom of God is like a vineyard into which the owner is perpetually, with endless patience, inviting even the idle and loitering, assuring them of a recompense, free and munificent, if they will, even late, hearken and enter. But if, to change the figure, if, when the great day comes, the professed expectant is found with expiring lamp and empty vessel, indolently hoping that another's grace or another's providence may suffice for the passport

or the viaticum of two—or if, to vary the parable once more, the servant trusted with his Lord's talent, instead of turning it to profit, has buried it in the earth, foolishly and irreverently answering in the day of account, 'Lo, there thou hast that is thine'—in all these cases the door of the kingdom, which stood wide open before, will be found closed against the admission, because it is a kingdom, not of name, but of power—not of form and profession, but of reality, spirit, and life.

This kingdom, thus defined for us by its King, has a past, a present, and a future. It has always been. In some of its essentials, it is as ancient as man's fall. So long as God has dealt with our race on a footing of mercy and judgment, so long there has existed the 'kingdom' which we speak of. The light of the Cross and the Resurrection was thrown back upon dead saints. The Epistle to the Hebrews gathers past generations into the family and household of faith. Faint and flickering was the lamp of hope which they read by: still, in proportion as they drew nigh to and walked closely with God, they entered into the filial trust and the fatherly safeguard, and found in it strength to live and strength to die, as heirs of a home and a kingdom which God would manifest in His time.

The announcement of the kingdom, as instantly to be established, was the message of our Lord's personal ministry. To explain its nature, to write its principles on the hearts of its first preachers and heralds, was the object of His continuance below, more especially during the memorable forty days between Resurrection and Ascension. We are expressly told by St Luke, that, during that interval, He was engaged, when He visited the disciples, in 'speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom.' Its establishment was on the great day of Pentecost, when, having ascended into heaven, He sent forth the Holy Spirit, in all the varied offices of His Gospel grace, to be the Presence and the Power and the Life of God Himself in the hearts of them that believe. From that day to this, the kingdom has been a reality and a power upon the earth. Men have entered it outwardly by Baptism, inwardly by faith—the former a sacrament, involving promise, opportunity, responsibility—transferring a man from heathenism into a state of knowledge and grace, profitable or perilous according to its use—the latter a gift of God, answering prayer, and turning heart and life into a new capacity and a new nature. 'A great multitude, which no man can number,' is the inspired reckoning of the citizens of that heavenly

kingdom which is the reign of God in souls, separately convinced, converted, sanctified, and at last made meet for glory.

But the kingdom thus foreshadowed, thus established, thus realized, thus replenished, is not yet 'come.' We neither hope, nor pray, for that which is. The prayer, 'Thy kingdom come,' teaches us to distinguish the era of grace from the era of glory. It is a direct prayer for that consummation which shall be the final subjugation of all enemies—unbelief, misery, sin, at last death itself—to the great Lord of life and salvation, the final rolling away of the reproach of His people, the final entrance upon the everlasting inheritance for which a toiling and suffering Creation has been throughout its generations waiting and watching.

(1) Brethren, if this be so, it is a solemn and a responsible thing to pray, 'Thy kingdom come.' Think what is involved in it. It is a prayer for the Second Advent. It is a prayer for the close of the day of grace. It is a prayer for the termination of the world as we see it, of human life as we live it, with its mingling of good and evil, and for the introduction of a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Who shall pray this prayer any more? Shall not

the very command to pray it—the very charge, ‘When ye pray, say, Thy kingdom come,’—divide us at once into two classes—of those who can, and of those who cannot?

I would be true to the Master’s word and the Master’s interpretation—for the truth’s sake, and for love’s sake no less. If the Word of God does not strike home, we are ‘nothing bettered’ by it. The Lord’s Prayer was given us, in part, as a touchstone—refuse it not. The Church herself has so read this petition. Standing by the open grave, we pray, all of us in our turn, as the hand of God smites us with a fresh bereavement, ‘that it may please Him shortly to accomplish the number of His elect, and to hasten His kingdom.’ Yet whose heart has not misgiven him, as he prayed that prayer, lest perhaps he be asking his own condemnation, his own exclusion from the grace of life? This is the Church’s prayer—this is the Lord’s prayer—is it, can it be, ours?

Not to daunt or discourage, but to help and to edify, is this word, like each word of God, written and spoken. We said upon the ‘hallowing of the Name’—we will say now of the ‘coming of the Kingdom’—that, over and above the full and deep sense, in which the Church, in which the saint, prays for it, it has a sense, real and true, in which the ‘babe in

Christ' may ask it—and that it is one mark of the divinity of the Prayer, and therefore of the Lord who gave it, that it is thus manifold, thus versatile, in its meaning, on the lips of one and of another.

(2) 'Thy kingdom come'—may we not say, to me? Put down in me, O Father, all that exalts and magnifies itself against Thy law and against Thy rule.

'Mortify and kill all vices in me'—all corrupt desires, all rebel murmurings, all worldly ambitions, all resentful, proud, vainglorious thoughts—and establish in me that spiritual kingdom which is 'righteousness and peace and joy in Thy Holy Spirit.'

For is not this prayer akin to that? Is not he who prays for the individual kingdom praying that which points to and makes preparation for the universal? Is not the 'coming' to the man one part of the mighty, the glorious, the magnificent Advent? Far better is it that we should pray *this* prayer with all our hearts than that we should pray *that* prayer with doubt or grudging.

But see, brethren! see how responsible a thing is even this lower and more limited asking. See how it pledges us to the warfare with evil. See how it places us on the side of God in the great war—how it makes it a treachery and a falsehood, afterwards, to

go over to the sin and to the denial which is sure to assail and to entice us yet again.

Shall I pray, 'Thy kingdom come'—reign in me—reign over my appetites, reign over my passions, reign over my lusts—be King in my heart—that I may perfectly love Thee, and count it base, disloyal, dishonourable, so much as to listen to Thy detraction or to Thy denial—and then go and do the abominable thing which Thou hatest? Forbid it, Lord! Let the Lord's Prayer be the Sacrament of my allegiance, the Sacrament of my devotion, the Sacrament of my love.

(3) I should be false to my charge, if I did not remind you also of the Missionary aspect of this prayer. 'Thy kingdom come' is a prayer for Missions. Wonderful, most wonderful, that Christendom should have prayed the Prayer for centuries, and gone to sleep over her duty—that it should have been possible to ask for the kingdom, and not to obey the mandate of Evangelization! May it be so no more. May a new spirit of self-forgetfulness come into the Church's heart and into our own. They who cannot go may at least be instant in prayer. We have been ashamed to pray. They who were neither going nor giving could not pray. There was honesty, if there was condemnation, in the silence.

But now let us enter into the question as persons concerned. If we go not—if we see not the open door—if we are unfit to go—if we have other work found for us—if God wants us here—then, entering into judgment with ourselves, and so preventing (as St Paul writes) the Divine judgment, we shall find the fountain of prayer unsealed, reopened—we shall keep alive at home the spirit of grace and of supplication—we shall feel ourselves in the field of Mission because in the field of intercession—‘to pray is to toil’—to those who know what prayer is we shall add fearlessly, ‘to pray is to toil, and to wrestle, and to bleed.’

(4) Is there one—there must be one in this large audience—not yet touched, not yet spoken to, in this poor comment, this feeble expostulation? Is there one, leaving the Church unimpressed—with no purpose of praying this prayer in either sense, its lower or its higher? Let me stay his departing step with one smallest request—that he will pray ‘Thy kingdom come’ as a prayer that he himself may at last reach heaven. You will say it is the wish of every man and all men. I know it. Yet I doubt whether it is the *prayer* of every man and all men. I doubt whether, day by day, at night and morning, every member of this Congregation earnestly prays to God for grace to die happy—for grace to reach

heaven. Between the wish and the prayer—between the vague general desire not to be lost for ever, not to be condemned in God's judgment, not to go away into everlasting punishment, and the earnest, resolute, I had almost said stern, prayer, to be brought safe to heaven, to be remembered when Christ comes in His kingdom—lies, for many, the whole distance and difference between a life of wickedness and a life of godliness. If you can pray this prayer in no other sense—neither as a prayer for the Advent, nor as a prayer for the reign of God in you, nor as a prayer for the reign of God on earth where now He is unknown—pray it thus. Pray it as a prayer, written for you by that kind, that compassionate, that martyred Friend, who will not let you go without a blessing—that you, you yourself, may not perish, but have everlasting life. 'Lord, remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom.' Pray this, day by day, from this time forth while you live—and if it may not be a safeguard against all evil, if it may not keep off from you all infection and contagion of sin, at least it shall save you from a scoffing, an infidel, an apostate spirit—from a life dead to the Saviour, and a soul cut off from its God.

THY KINGDOM COME.

IV.

MATTHEW VI. 10.

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

IT is a prayer. It is not an act of submission.

It is not an expression of acquiescence, such as a man defeated, or a man bereaved, or a man punished, may languidly breathe, in his chair or upon his bed, and count himself resigned, and, because resigned, religious. It is a prayer—one of the six prayers—brief, strong, explicit—of the one weighty and solemn Liturgy which our Lord Jesus Christ left behind Him to regulate and to quicken the perpetual worship of His struggling, suffering, and aspiring people.

A prayer must first be a wish. We cannot ask as we ought, unless first we desire. It is this which makes so many prayers languid and lifeless. We do not wish for the graces, for the blessings, for the victories, which, as Christians, we must ask.

Yet even the wish must be prayed. Not every wish is a prayer—though, if it be not a sinful wish, it is ready to become a prayer. Prayer is a wish breathed into the ear of God.

The Lord's Prayer is no exception to these rules. To pray, we must ask—to ask, we must wish—to wish, we must understand. May this night's instruction help us—God grant it—with respect to this one grand, solemn, almost awful, petition—

'THY WILL BE DONE IN EARTH, AS IT IS IN
HEAVEN.'

'Who hath resisted His will?' St Paul asks, as though he would cut up by the roots all prayer for that which *must* be.

And it is indeed true that there are wills of God which need no praying for. That will of God which set Nature (as we speak) in motion—that will of God which keeps Providence (as we speak) in action—the one securing the orderly course of material systems, the other overruling the anxious, perilous, terrible march of cause and consequence, of reaping and sowing, in matters which have lives and souls for their factors and for their results—these two wills of God none can help and none can hinder: we can but make room for them, bow and submit ourselves, and let them work. At all events, with respect to those two

wills of God, we must pray with a double peradventure—with a twice-guarded remembrance of our own insignificance as well as of our own unworthiness, and with an entire willingness to be taught that, though we may entreat God to 'take away the cup' from us, we must be prepared to find that there is but one answer, and to believe that it is the best—'My grace is sufficient for thee—My strength is made perfect in weakness.'

But the 'will' of which this petition speaks is a will entirely within the scope of prayer.

St Paul defines it when he says, 'This is the will of God, even your sanctification.' Our Lord Himself indicates it when He says, 'Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother.' And again, 'If any man will (wills to) do His will, he shall know of my doctrine.'

There is a will of God concerning our lives; concerning that part of our lives—the department of inward and outward action—which it has pleased Him to set in our own power.

That marvellous free-will, characteristic of men and Angels—fettered only by some past choice of evil—never wholly lost, either in its responsibility or in its power—yet so prone to error and wrong, so heavily biassed in the direction of sinning, that it

needs help from without, Divine help, to move, to guide, and to propel it towards its own good—this it is which can, in the present, within its own sphere, resist God, and can, with the most absolute confidence, be committed in prayer to God's keeping, for its correction, its control, its sanctification.

'Thy will be done'—in that province in which alone it finds opposition; in that region which Thou hast suffered for the present, for a little season—long to us, but brief in comparison with the two eternities which it divides and keeps asunder—to be the arena and the battle-field of two combatants, good and evil—the one sure of victory, but the other 'having great wrath because it knows that it hath but a short time.' 'Thy will be done' in the will of man—in its powerful yet gentle subjugation to the will which is for his good and for his salvation. Grant success, O Father, to that agency of Gospel grace which Thou hast commissioned to work, and to spread, and to influence, until at last it bring all this one rebel race into blessed and joyous captivity to the Lord and to His Christ.

This petition, therefore, like the last preceding it, looks onward to a time still future. It prays not for the gradual, but for the complete. Let the time come—hasten the day—when it shall be said, Thy will, O God, is done. There can be no rest till then

—no happiness till then—for the race, and for its earth. He who has the mind of Christ—he who knows anything of the meaning of the ‘sigh’ accompanying the ‘Ephphatha’—will find no fulness of satisfaction even in his own emancipation from the fetter of corruption and from the bondage of the will. He will still pray—yes, if it be in the Paradise of the blessed—‘Thy will be done,’ so long as there is one unevangelized nation, or one unsanctified soul, or one sin-bound will, on a still rebel and exile earth. ‘Thy will be done’ is a prayer still unanswered, so long as the prayer beside it has still to be prayed, ‘Thy kingdom come.’

We have said concerning the other—we will say also concerning this—that it makes a great demand upon the faith and upon the devotion. The Lord’s Prayer, short, simple, homely as it is, tries to the uttermost the spirituality of His people. To be bidden to ask all for God, and then all for the brethren—to have no place, no corner, left for self, in that act which might seem to have its chief explanation in the individual want and weakness—this is severe. But to be bidden, in this unselfish self-forgetting devotion, to ask for things which cannot be till earth is heaven—which cannot be fulfilled till sin, with all its pleasures and all its excitements, which

go so far to make this life what it is, shall have been utterly vanquished and exterminated, and all things, literally all things, shall have become new—this is indeed a call of infinite difficulty—it might almost drive us back from that which promised to be our help and our consolation, and make us say, ‘Who is sufficient for these things?’ who amongst us is capable of praying this Prayer?

But, while it is a **great office** of the Lord’s Prayer **to humble us** for our backwardness and for our earthliness and for our carnal mind, Christ meant us never to be destitute, in its use and in its possession, of a help and a guide, whatsoever we be, in our approaches to the Father who is in heaven. Therefore let us think now, in what sense we, who dare not pray for the mighty Advent, with its terrible attendant Judgment, and all the fearful severances and separations then to be made even amongst those who have here dwelt lovingly and securely together—in what sense, I say, we may yet pray the Lord’s Prayer, ‘Thy will be done,’ without unreality and without irreverence.

The greater has in it the less—the final the progressive—the perfect the partial. Every man who does the will of God prepares, promotes, even hastens, its fulfilment. ‘Thy will be done, with me, by me, in

me,' is a prayer, and the best of prayers, for its accomplishment in the universe. That I, in my individual insignificant place in God's earth, may be entirely submissive, entirely obedient, entirely receptive of His holy influence, entirely of one will with His holy will, is a prayer, and the best of prayers, for the conformity of all men everywhere and eternally to His design and to His purpose concerning them.

(1) Let us pray this prayer. It shall not be cast out. Not in a spirit of indolent acquiescence, not in a spirit of reluctant resignation, not in the spirit of one who has tried all turns and all escapes, and has to confess himself outmatched by a subtler or vanquished by a mightier—but rather as one who recognizes a Father's hand and a Father's love in the power that constrains him, and would not, even if he could, have any one thing other than it is, or any voice at all of his own, in the arrangement of his circumstances of joy or sorrow—thus let us pray the prayer, Thy will be done with me.

(2) There is another aspect of the petition. God has a will concerning our actions. He has given to each one his work and his talent. It is a wonderful thought—but perfectly true—that God, in the high and holy heaven, cares what we do; would have us occupied thus, not thus, this day, this hour; would

have us go hither, not thither; see this person, not that; express ourselves thus, use our influence thus, write this letter, attend this Service, say this prayer. I do not think that the particularity has in it anything derogatory to His dignity or to His majesty. The same God, to whom nothing can be great but Himself, both guides the stars in their courses, and 'feedeth the young ravens that cry.' 'The hairs of your head are all numbered'—and 'not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father.' If one word of all this be true, judge ye what a responsible, what an anxious matter it must be to do the will of God. How needful must it be for us to pray this prayer early in the morning, and to live in the spirit of it all the day long—Thy will, O God, be done by me.

(3) There is yet one other aspect of the prayer. We know that God looks on the heart. No minuteness of obedience in outward act could do anything towards the fulfilment of that will which is our sanctification. That sanctification, which is (in other words) consecration, the making the whole man to belong to God—will, judgment, feeling, affection—so that each shall move in perfect spontaneous harmony with the mind of Him whose he is and whom he serves—this is a higher and a deeper thing even than the conduct: here, in all this, God Himself is present,

our sake became man, that He might raise us 'out of darkness and error into the clear light and true knowledge' of Him who is the Fountain of Life as of Love, and in whose light alone His created can see light.

tentation of beings illustrating a Creator's resources or echoing a Creator's praise.

Much more forcibly is this narrowness of conception exemplified, when we pass from the material to the spiritual—from a Creation embodied in form to a Creation invisible and insubstantial. They who, like us, find it difficult to realize at all the life of spirit, may well find it embarrassing to conceive an existence in which the spirit is the life. It suits well the arrogance as well as the indolence of humanity, to profess scepticism as to a heaven 'peopled with spirits,' or a life in which God, present in nearer self-manifestation, is absolutely the 'All in all' to intelligences high above ourselves alike in the intuition of truth and in the exercise of power.

Yet a world thus mysterious, thus magnificent, Christ has opened to us, for our humiliation, for our instruction, for our consolation—and in His own Prayer He bids us make mention of it as a plea with God.

Not to gratify curiosity, not to encourage speculation, not even to create a theology has Christ spoken anywhere, or here. He has given no systematic revelation, in any part of His Word, concerning Angelic history or Angelic existence. What He has said is practical. What He has said is incidental

impossible thing to flesh and blood—‘the absolution and remission of our sins?’

Let us, first, as is our wont, take fully into view the words themselves which Christ has here uttered on purpose that we may utter them after Him in the ear of God.

What a change of scene and of subject! Last week we were thinking of want: next week we shall be thinking of danger: to-night we are to think of sin. Is not sin as real, as vital, a thought as the other two? Must not that life, that soul, be in evil case, which has no word to say about its sins when it ‘bows itself before the High God?’

We have different phrases in Scripture to express sin. We have two before us in the texts.

We are in debt. We have known, perhaps, at some moment of our boyhood or manhood, what the burden of a debt may be towards man—how it undermines strength, destroys rest, makes cowards and criminals of the bravest and the most upright. ‘The one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty:’ what matters the sum, if we ‘have not to pay?’

That which a debt is toward man, a sin is toward God. We may not equally be conscious of it. Alas! too often we lead tranquil lives enough, lose neither

rest nor appetite, can even play as well as work, when we are drowned in debt to God. It is only when something occurs, within or without, to make truth real—some threatened exposure, some dreaded punishment, at least some distress, or danger, or sickness, or approaching death—that sin starts into life, and becomes ‘a burden too heavy for us to bear.’ Even then it is not always the sin—it is more often only the consequence of sin—which alarms and bewilders us. Sin as a debt is a strange thought still to many. Not until Christ begins to be real—Christ, and the Cross—shall we ever feel it as we ought. Then shall we see how not only a few prayers, or a few almsgivings; or a few Communions, but we ourselves, soul and body, were God’s own, and could only be kept back from Him, either in obedience or in deep heart’s affection, by a fraud and a dishonesty adding debt to debt.

St Luke has yet another word. ‘Forgive us our sins.’ That commonest of all words for our wrongdoing, suggests the thought, rather, of ‘failure’—of missing the aim and mark of being—of ‘coming short of the glory’ for which God destined us as the recipients of grace and the reflectors of His image. It is a glorious ideal—seen, not least, in its failure. We ought to have been so much—we are so little.

We ought, here below, to have represented God Himself one to another. We ought to have made others to see how beautiful God is in His love and in His holiness. We have not done so. We have 'all sinned, and come short of His glory.' There are souls capable of entering into this idea of sin. What might we have been? what might we not have been? and what are we? O the capabilities of this being! Yes, I see, I see in the sorrowful retrospect, what I might have been to my friends, to my fellows, to my generation. This is that 'failure' which I bring to God in saddest, lowliest, most remorseful supplication.

'We are in the land of debts,' says a great Reformer: 'we are up to the ears in sin.' How wonderful that Christ the Redeemer should thus mercifully recognize by anticipation the very failure of His own Redemption—that He should thus incorporate in His own Prayer the recognition of that failure—that, whereas He came 'that we should not sin,' He yet bids us pray on the supposition that we have sinned! I know nothing more human, more Divine, anywhere in His Gospel, than this recognition. A vulgar, coarse, scoffing intellect, says, 'Christ knew that He would be a failure.' I venture to say, on the contrary, That Divine Person knew that in tenderness, in sympathy, in the confession of the human weakness

which would, no doubt, in part defeat the present triumph, the earth-witnessed glory, of His Gospel, lay a greater triumph, and a greater glory, still, in the eventual manifestation of a strength perfected in weakness.

But so it is. The Lord's Prayer, having only six petitions, and, of these, three about God, makes mention, for Christian people, of debts, of trespasses, of sins, as quite every-day experiences, as much as are the wants of soul and body, or the dangers spread before us in life's future. 'Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.'

Brethren! the forgiveness of sins is a revelation peculiar to the Gospel. Nature has no sure message concerning it. Nature has oftentimes to punish transgression with a sternness quite relentless. The only teacher of forgiveness prior to the Gospel—and that but in parable and dark saying—was the Law given by Moses. Those much-maligned, much-despised sacrifices of the Levitical system were indeed the 'shadow cast before' of a Gospel afterwards to be revealed. Those sacrifices, which could not, of themselves, take away sins, were God's prophecy of an Atonement to a nation sense-bound and carnal. And when Christ came, He spoke, Himself, of forgiveness, as the most difficult, the most absolutely undiscover-

able, of all God's secrets. He said that even Sanctification was less abstruse than Justification. He said that no one could tell of Atonement but He who had been in Heaven. That was *the* revelation—in comparison with which even Regeneration, the new birth by the Spirit, was easy and of the earth. Brethren ! if it were not for Christ's clear revelation, I could not believe in a free forgiveness. Cause and effect, antecedent and consequence, are so linked and bound together on God's earth, that the idea of their severance—which is, in other words, the release of the soul that has sinned from the death which sin merits—can only be accepted as the explicit assertion, the direct revelation, of Him who knows all things, and was present when the very foundations of earth and time were laid. Christ appeals to that original, that celestial knowledge. I believe Him—because I never yet knew the thing in which He lied. I believe Him—because I find, in His life and in His work, so clear a proof that He came from God with a message, and that that message was love, was forgiveness, was a cancelling of the debt, for souls sunk in self and dead in sin.

Now He bids us here to believe in that forgiveness—and to believe in it as daily needed and always sure.

Have any of us been led away with the error of an instantaneous perfection? Can we so read the Bible, or so inspect the mirror of conscience, as to imagine ourselves not to sin? Poor deluded victims of a superstition which does violence to fact! Is not the dream of present perfection sin enough in itself? Is it not the denial of one half (at least) of the very work of Christ—the denial of the Priesthood, if not of the Sacrifice? Is it not to expunge one whole petition from the Prayer of Christ? We will use that Prayer in its simplicity—and while we use it, we can dream no dream of an attained perfection.

Beautifully, I think, has the width and compass of sin been expressed by a holy man lately departed. ‘Duties unfulfilled; words unspoken, or spoken lightly, violently, or untruly; holy relationships neglected; days wasted, and now gone for ever; evil thoughts once cherished, which are ever re-appearing as fresh as when they were first admitted into the heart; talents cast away; affections trifled with; light within turned to darkness’—such is our ‘debt,’ our ‘trespass,’ our ‘sin.’

An older saint than he has said—for the Church of the fourth century and the Church of the nineteenth century are one and the same—‘Call not yourselves

righteous, as though ye had no cause to say, "Forgive us our debts." Though ye abstain from murder...and such other sins which I do not name...still there is no want of occasions whereby a man may sin. A man sins when he sees with pleasure what he ought not to see. How great sins doth the deadly tongue commit! How often do we pray, and our thoughts are elsewhere—as though we forgot before whom we are standing, or before whom we are prostrating ourselves! If all these things be collected together against us, will they therefore not overwhelm us because they are small faults! What matter is it whether lead or sand overwhelm us? The lead is all one mass, the sand is small grains, but by their great number they overwhelm thee. So thy sins are small. Seest thou not how the rivers are filled, and the lands are wasted, by small drops? They are small, but they are many.' Such is our 'debt,' our 'trespass,' our 'sin.'

Forgive—remit—dismiss it. Wonderful prayer—addressed to Him who commanded the opposite of all these things—who has knit together act and consequence—and to whom now we appeal to undo His own work. Was ever miracle greater than this miracle? To roll back the Red Sea or the Jordan upon itself were easier surely, far easier, than this—

this undoing of the thing done—this cancelling of the unpayable debt.

This, brethren, is the miracle of miracles of the Gospel Dispensation. You count it a great thing—it is so—when you see the Holy Ghost breathing into dead matter newness of life ; when you see the lifeless affection rekindled, and the sinner, buried in his lusts and passions, quickened out of that grave into newness of life. But surely even this miracle, were infinites comparable, might shrink into insignificance in contrast with that one other. In this, you see the effect, if not the instrumentality. You hear the wind, if you cannot track it. In the other, all is faith, all is supernatural, all is Divine. God, by the *fiat* of His own ‘Let there be light,’ bids the past, which is a real existence, shrivel up, and be no more. God bids the wicked act which you did last night, in your wantonness or in your refusal to reflect, to die with itself and bear no fruit. Did you think, when you lightly or summarily said last night’s prayer, ‘Forgive us our sins,’ all, all that was involved in it? You might not—but Christ did. Christ, who presided over Creation—Christ, who became Incarnate that He might ‘become sin’—Christ took the measure of it. Christ taught that Prayer which you uttered—only I cannot tell whether the lips

which said it meant it, felt it, or 'babbled' in the uttering.

And now, brethren, what say we? Is there any condition here? any condition of confession first, to man, or to God? I dismiss the former question, of confession to man, because it seems to me utterly and absolutely out of place—except, indeed, as one part of that 'forgiveness of our own debtors' upon which a word will be said ere we have done. I cannot believe that Christ meant any man to come, even as a helper, even as an abettor, between the soul and its God. It is the glory, it is the originality, it is the power, of the Gospel, that it brings together, face to face, without any intermediate, the two Beings which are at issue, God and the soul. You say you can help this meeting—take heed that you do not hinder it. If Christ had intended a priest, I think that He would have said so. I do not think that the soul needs any information, any instruction, as to its secrets—except what it can derive, if it will, from the public ministry of the Word.

At all events, when the assistance has been given, or without it, the soul and its God must stand face to face. And the soul must then pray Christ's prayer, very earnestly, very humbly, and very believingly, 'Forgive us'—not me only—me, and all men—there

lies the very strength, and the very tenderness, of the supplication—‘Forgive us our trespasses.’ What trespasses? God might answer. Yes—for there are men, doubtless, who pray this prayer, which ought to be so humbling, with a self-ignorant, self-satisfied feeling. Therefore the first necessity is, that sin should be a reality to us. Christ was wont to say on earth—God says in like manner from heaven—‘What wilt thou that I should do for thee?’ That question is sometimes received with a stare of wonder. ‘Did I not speak? Did I not pray the Lord’s Prayer? My bread—my sins—my temptations—all in a breath—all promiscuously, and of course—Give—forgive—deliver.’ Is that prayer? God must be enquired of, even concerning His promise—else is there no voice, nor any to answer.

Therefore, when we reach the prayer for forgiveness, there must first be confession. But, I ask again, what confession? Is there no pleading for forgiveness, with God Himself, without a detail and catalogue of trespasses? Is there no such possibility as a sense of sin, sharp and deep, without one description, or one rehearsal, or one express mention, of a particular transgression? Is there, think you, any conviction of sin, more real or more acceptable, than that which sees Christ on His cross, and sees me in my sin, and

desires to bring together, as two entire entities, the sinner and the Saviour? which is not so much affected by that one rash word, or that one careless omission, or that one sinful action, as by the utter and total blackness which made it necessary that such a 'fountain' should be 'opened for sin and for uncleanness,' and which makes it necessary that I, all black, should plunge myself in it, should wash and be clean?

It is well that there should be enough of minuteness to prevent the possibility of unreality and vagueness. Some sins, some kinds of sins, are better left in the general. Others, specimens and samples, may with advantage be looked into and spread open. But memory is insidious as well as treacherous—and I would not have a man too curious in searching and exploring it. See that you feel as well as call yourself a sinner—but know and believe that God knows all things, and trust Him to apply your prayer to the history of the life open before Him. One earnest gaze upon Christ is worth a thousand scrutinies of self—the man who beholds the cross, and beholding it weeps, cannot be really blind nor perilously self-ignorant.

Above all things we are to beware of diminishing our sins by attempts at self-exculpation. 'Be merciful

unto my sin: for it is great'—is a Divine prayer. Be merciful to my sins—for they are few, or small, or easily to be apologized for—because 'the serpent beguiled me,' or because 'the woman whom Thou gavest to be with me gave me of the fruit'—this is the prayer which defeats and contradicts itself—the prayer of the self-excuser, for whom Christ Himself died in vain.

'Forgive'—the original word is, 'Dismiss'—our trespasses. King Hezekiah expresses the same thought in strong figure, when he says, 'Thou hast cast all my sins behind Thy back.' And the prophet Micah uses an equivalent metaphor—'Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.' Even such is the 'remission,' the 'dismissal,' the 'sending away,' which is asked—and therefore promised—in the Divine Prayer.

Forgive—as we forgive.

Solemn words. Take heed lest the prayer become imprecation. Take heed lest, 'bringing thy gift to the altar' without 'being first reconciled to thy brother,' thou thyself be imploring the retention of thine own sins, because thou hast not thyself 'dismissed' his. The 'hundred pence' are small, small to insignificance, in the face of the 'ten thousand talents'—and sometimes we fancy that we recognize

that insignificance, and would remit the debt if it were heavier. It is not worth while, we say, bringing that trifle into God's presence—God forgive him, though I forgive not. God forgive me the great debt, though I forgive not my brother the little one.

Brethren ! in the sight of God, in the affairs of the soul, there is neither great nor little. That unforgiven wrong, real or imaginary, lies like the nether millstone upon thy soul. The spirit of the unforgiving is incompatible with the state of the forgiven. Love is the region in which forgiveness works. Blessing and cursing dwell not together, nor can the love of God rest where the love of man is not. 'That your prayers be not hindered' is the motive for domestic peace—'if ye forgive not, neither can God forgive,' is the plea for washing away all unkindness ere we draw nigh to God's altar.

In this, as in all things, let us acknowledge, let us take into our hearts, the love of God. It is not that He establishes harsh conditions as barriers between us and Him. 'I command thee this day,' the old Lawgiver said to Israel, 'for thy good.' Tell me, ye who have tried both states, which is the happier—the state of discord, or the state of peace? Was the effort unrewarded, was it unblessed, by which you,

the injured, constrained the love of the injurer? Was it without even a present, a human, recompense, that you sought out him who had done the wrong, took all the blame upon yourself, and so sent him, and went yourself, loved and loving, to the throne of grace? These are Gospel struggles, Gospel victories—in making them duties, God has but bound us to our own peace and to our own happiness. In bidding us say, ‘Forgive as we have forgiven,’ He does but say, in the riddle of His revelation, ‘*Ensuite la paix, et l’héritage d’une bénédiction.*’

‘Forgiven.’ Who shall say what comfort, what joy, what life, lies in that word? ‘Forgiven,’ here on earth—‘forgiven’ this night for the sins of this day. Yes, there is a transaction, real and significant, passing, day by day, in ten thousand times ten thousand homes, between sin-laden souls and the sin-dismissing God. These things are no peradventure—no matters of doubt, uncertainty, or vague hope. Wheresoever the sacrifice of Christ is pleaded out of a true heart, there is sin cancelled and grace restored. The one sweeping forgiveness may lie far in the past—yet is there day by day a forgiveness needed, and a forgiveness vouchsafed. ‘He that hath bathed himself,’ all over, once for all, in the ocean of Atonement, ‘needeth not’ afterward ‘save to wash his feet’—yet that

partial washing he needs, and here it is provided for. 'When ye pray, say, Forgive us our sins'—and He that hears in heaven His dwelling-place, when He hears, forgives.

VII.

MATTHEW VI. 13.

*And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us
from evil.*

How real is the Gospel! Though it discloses to us that which eye hath not seen, yet how perfectly does it adapt itself to our want, and deal with us as we are! In opening to us a new world—the very opposite, in many respects, of this present—it never affects to disparage the things that make up our life as we live it, or to represent as shadows or phantoms the experiences which throng us and press us in the highway of business, the contact of home, or the chamber of solitude.

The Lord's Prayer has lifted our thought on high, and taught us that more than Angel's language in which we may commune with an Invisible Father. It has bidden us to school our hearts into a new

estimate of things interesting and things important. It has made us recognize as existences plans and purposes and systems which have no place in the calculations of statesmen or the councils of kings. It has put upon our lips the definite mention of a Name, and a Kingdom, and a Will, of which men reckon not, and a prayer concerning each—a hallowing, and a coming, and a doing—which it assumes to be desirable, and which it would educate us to desire.

When at last the Lord's Prayer, having first taught us our insignificance—having first strengthened us by the recollection of Another, whom to know is eternal life, whom to serve with all the heart is perfect freedom—suffers us to return to earth, and to remember its circumstances and its necessities—it does so with a simplicity, and a directness, and an unselfishness also, which speaks a Master's hand and a Divine inspiration. It sums up all want into three particulars, one concerned with the present, another with the past, and a third with the future—making each strong and ample, and adding to it that implication of promise which is 'the anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast.'

The third and last of these is our topic this evening. None could be more grave in its thoughts, or more impressive in its admonitions.

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER
US FROM EVIL.

The soul forgiven its trespasses must go back into the world in which it has trespassed. Can it do so in a light or confident spirit? Who must not feel, as he rises from his knees, assured of God's forgiveness, that it would be a dreadful crime to go back to his sins—that, to speak as a man, it would be horrible ingratitude, and, to speak as a Christian, it would be frightful sacrilege?

And yet, there is the world, and our prayer has not altered it. There is the flesh, and our prayer has not altered it. There is the devil—waiting to devour—and our prayer leaves him as he was, alike in power and in malignity.

Is ours, then, but half a Gospel? Is there pardon for the having sinned, and no help, no safeguard, no fortress, against the sinning?

We call the Gospel real because it does take into view the realities of our situation. If the Lord's Prayer had ended with forgiveness, I should have felt confident that it was mutilated. Christ would not leave it so. St Luke leaves out the petition about the Will. Doubtless he felt it to be included in the Name and the Kingdom. St Luke leaves out the 'Deliver us from evil.' Doubtless he felt that it was

involved in the 'Lead us not into temptation.' St Matthew and St Luke both (according to the best authorities) omit the doxology—end with the petition before us. Doubtless that was an early, though a perfectly pure and reverent, addition by the Church, for purposes of worship, to the actual liturgy of Jesus Christ. But it would have been a *hiatus* absolutely unaccountable—and therefore it is not—if the prayer had ended with the past, and made no mention of the future. Christ does bid us, while we leave the supply of the future, its bread temporal and spiritual, entirely in the hands of God, to make special prayer for the spiritual perils which must beset and waylay us while we are in this body.

For indeed they are real. No state of life, no age, no character, is free from them. In this, high and low, rich and poor, wise and ignorant, joyous and sorrowful, are alike and (in God's sight, we believe) equal. In all there is the hungry, craving, disconsolate self—the self of affection, and the self of passion, and the self of lusting. In all there is the surrounding, deafening, maddening world—with its lying vanities, its imperious edicts, its insidious wiles. In all there is the marvellous, mysterious, prowling tempter—taking advantage of every infirmity, and accusing afterwards before God those whom he has

first seduced into disobedience. It is impossible to overstate or to overcolour the risks and the jeopardies of life as we live it. O, if we were but bystanders, if we were but spectators, unconcerned, ourselves, in its perils and in its agonies, could we, could we, be indifferent? But we are not lookers on; we are actors, we are sufferers, on this stage of mystery. For ruin or for salvation, we are ourselves players. Not least they who occupy that supposed place of safety—life's middle ground between greatness and littleness, between wealth and poverty, between joy and misery—they too are actors—they too have their special snares of apathy and unconcern, of security and indifference—nay, in the sight of God and His holy Angels, there is no such spot, on this earth, as one neutral and contemplative—it is a world of war and battle, and we, we are in the thick of it.

But it is time that we should attempt to give some definiteness to the description before us, by dwelling upon the two characteristic terms, 'temptation,' and 'evil.'

Many difficulties are found here by the ingenuity of interpreters—but I trust that they will not much trouble those who desire nothing but direction.

I need scarcely say that the Greek has but one word for 'trial' and 'temptation.' The idea is the

same. It is exploration. It is the idea of piercing or penetrating the outer shell and husk of a man, to discover what is within him. You know how ambiguous is the character of a human being, while he simply goes his way, does his business, mixes in society, and makes his little mark upon a street, a town, or a congregation. You do not know him—does he know himself?—as he is in God's sight, as he is for eternity. At last something occurs. He is placed in circumstances which must be dealt with. Many have been 'explored' by an opportunity of advancing themselves by means not perfectly upright—by some possible secret venture with another's credit or another's property—by an opportunity of screening that which, if known, would be fatal—of covering up some fraud, of disguising some guilt, of which they dare not confront the exposure and the ruin. Many more, ten thousand in comparison with one, have been 'explored' by a suggestion of sinning. Some one has too much trusted them—they have won an affection which it is possible to abuse—they have gained a reputation which may be the opportunity of deception—they have to settle, on the instant, no man seeing their motive, how this shall be. These are strong, glaring instances of the thing spoken of. Let us enlarge the field of observation.

Every time that an evil thought comes to us, it is an 'exploration'—are we true? are we faithful? can we be trusted out of sight? If so, we shall expel the lighted missile ere it can explode. We shall say at once, 'How can I so much as think this great wickedness, and sin against God?' If not, we shall dally and parley with it—we shall go to the edge—we shall look over—we shall excuse ourselves—'It is but a thought—no one talks of doing it'—and we shall be found out, by that meditation of the wrong thing, as not true, not faithful thoroughly and all through. This is temptation. It is this which we pray God, here, not to 'lead us into.'

St James says that God is as incapable of tempting as He is of being tempted. The idea that God could lay a snare for us is blasphemy. That is the devil's work. Still, if we believe at all in God's oversight of our life—in other words, in His guiding and 'leading' hand—we must feel that there are times and (as it were) places of 'exploration,' to which we do come under His direction; circumstances of trial, opportunities (in other words) of choosing between good and evil, which we cannot avoid, which confront us without our seeking, and concerning which we must make enquiry of Him who has charge of our lives. 'God did tempt Abraham'—His Word scruples not

at the saying—He brought upon him a great ‘crisis’—what is ‘crisis’ but the Greek word for ‘trial?’—which formed a decision as to his faith. If he was entirely faithful, he would act thus—if not, he would act thus. God ‘led him into temptation,’ that He might bring out his faith as gold from the furnace. Was there no specimen, there, of God’s dealing? Has God ceased thus to ‘tempt,’ thus to ‘explore,’ His people? Would it be in mercy, would it be in faithfulness, if He always refrained from ‘trying?’

And yet, brethren, knowing what we are, may we not well pray that God, of His mercy, would spare us, if it please Him, from these terrible scrutinies? O, that parting with the first-born, with the child of joy and promise—with the treasure dearer than life, with the boon granted to prayer itself—who is ready for it, with the confiding thought, with the ‘Not my will, but Thine, be done?’

Sometimes the ‘exploration’ comes in love—to reveal the thoroughness of the faith, the absoluteness of the self-devotion. Sometimes it comes, rather, to show to the man what is in him of evil. Yes, we believe that even a fall, shameful, pitiable, hateful, may be better, for the everlasting soul, than a condition of mere self-ignorance, carelessness, and self-conceit. It was better for Peter, in the boundless

eternity, that he denied Christ, than that he should have lived and died fancying himself upright. He was 'led into temptation'—and yet (mystery of grace) he was 'delivered from evil.' We read the inner history in St Luke's Gospel. 'Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you'—hath 'begged' you all of God, as in old time he besought the 'life' of Job—'that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not'—the very one whose faith failed most signally at the moment—'and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.' 'Pray that ye enter not (that ye be not led) into temptation:' and the reason—'the spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.'

What interpreter need we of the Lord's Prayer but the Lord its Author and Giver? He bade the disciples, that awful night of the Agony, to pray against the temptation which He knew of and which He foresaw. He felt the mighty difference between one kind, one result, of 'exploration,' and another. He was far-sighted to perceive the ultimate 'rising' in the temporary 'fall'—and though He foretold the threefold denial, He could yet bid Peter pray that he might not be tempted, and pray for him Himself, that his faith might not fail finally.

Which of us shall not pray to be spared, if it

be the will of God, from these fearful ordeals of exploration? If the flesh is weak where the spirit is ready, how shall it be with the weak flesh and the unready spirit? How sharp, how sudden, how fearful, may be the 'crisis' before any one of us! Who can judge, in the distance, what it may be near at hand? That possibility of which we had said, in cold blood, 'Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?'—it is come, it is upon us, and we are fallen! O the misery, the self-reproach, the remorse, the infinite difficulty, too, and uncertainty, of the rising! With what bitter tears shall we pray, next time, 'Lead us not into temptation!' No doctrinal or theoretical difficulties will check its utterance then. But, alas, the very prayer is weakened by the sinning—and, fast linked with the hope, vanishes the effort.

The Divine Author seems to have interpreted at the same time also the other saying—'Deliver us from evil.' The original is ambiguous. It may be rendered, 'from evil,' or, 'from the evil one.' I think the latter is the more probable meaning. Considering our Lord's frequent references to a personal tempter—considering the special instance just quoted, 'Satan hath desired you . . . but I have prayed for thee'—it seems natural to suppose that it is from 'the wicked one' that He here bids us pray for deliverance,

rather than from the less definite, more abstract thing to which we give the impersonal name of 'evil.'

There is much in reason, much in experience, to reconcile us to the unquestionable doctrine of Christ as to the existence, the restless and relentless activity, of an organized spiritual power of evil, apostate first, and then living only to seduce and to destroy. Such a revelation throws light upon a multitude of facts which would otherwise seem to impugn the mercy and goodness of God Himself to His own. If there is in existence an adverse, an antagonistic power, carrying on war, in hearts and lives, against the great and blessed Redeemer who will have all men to be saved, it is at least conceivable that the wretchedness and the wickedness which is working such havoc may be traceable to an authorship altogether apart from God's, and destined to an absolute extermination when that war of the ages is brought to its catastrophe. Mysterious as all this is—mysterious as must ever be (whatever your hypothesis) the existence and the origin of evil—at least we are able thus to understand that evil is no part of us, that it is (in a sense) external as well as hostile to us, that the influence under which we have fallen is one from which we may be set free, and that, if we will but boldly and manfully take God's side in the battle of this lifetime,

we shall assuredly share God's victory when at last He shall have taken to Himself His great glory, and put all enemies under the feet of Him who hath taken it upon Him to deliver man.

'Deliver us from the evil one.' Put forth Thy Almighty power for my rescue in the unequal struggle with leagued and banded spirits of wickedness. The very air is peopled with them. By night and by day they find access. Every unguarded point in my armour is perceived and made advantage of. A wily and experienced foe watches my going out and my coming in, my lying down and my rising up. Terrible, and yet most comforting, revelation! For if I can but be assured that this sin is not I myself, but the action upon me of temptation and a tempter, the worst sting is gone out of it. I am encouraged to betake myself to the One 'stronger than the strong man armed,' and to believe that, while I keep close to Him, while I 'abide inside' Him, while I exercise my privilege as His redeemed and His baptized, nothing can harm me—neither craft nor assault of the devil, neither the breath of seduction here, nor 'spirit-horde of wickedness in high places.' I may not indeed relax my watching—but while I watch I am safe. I may not look off from Christ—but looking to Christ I fear no evil. I may not, even for

a moment, tread the forbidden ground or touch the accursed thing—but, keeping within the bounds of duty and conscience, of love and devotion, I may rise and rest, I may work and enjoy—the Captain of my salvation has charge of me, and who can be against me?

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER
US FROM EVIL.

And who, brethren, can pray this prayer with a good conscience?

Not he who trifles with evil. Not he who 'runs' into danger. Not he who can tranquillize a false heart by praying for protection, and then thrust himself upon the place or the companionship or the meditation which he has a thousand times found to be the threshold and the vestibule of sinning. Not he, certainly, who here intercedes for his brother, 'Lead us . . . deliver us . . . ' and goes forth to weaken his decision for good, or to overbear and overpower it for evil. Brethren, the responsibilities of this prayer are commensurate with its blessings. We cannot pray it, as we have all prayed it thrice this evening, without pledging ourselves to God's side in the great world-wide and age-long battle. Let us make it our '*Sacramentum*,' our military oath, to Jesus our Redeemer, to-night. Let us behold Him, as He stands

there bound and bleeding before His earthly Judges—as He hangs there, between earth and heaven, pierced and thirsting, on the Cross of His shame and of His Atonement. Let us feel it impossible to deny Him who has so loved as to give Himself for us. Let the cry of our hearts this night be to Him, ‘By Thine Agony and bloody sweat, by Thy Cross and Passion, by Thy precious Death and Burial, by Thy glorious Resurrection and Ascension, and the coming of the Holy Ghost—

‘Good Lord, deliver us.’

‘In all time of our tribulation, in all time of our wealth; in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment—

‘Good Lord, deliver us.’

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